

Let's take a look back at the top stories of 2023. **PAGE 2**  
Flores: AG sans subpoena powers is embarrassing. **PAGE 15**

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**\$1**

*Hafa Adai!*

**Happy New Year!**

# Saipan Tribune

THE CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER



KIMBERLY B. ESMORES

Northern Marianas Protection and Advocacy Systems, Inc. executive director Greg Borja has been named *Saipan Tribune's* person of the year for his contribution to the advocacy of persons with disabilities in the CNMI.



KIMBERLY B. ESMORES

Greg Borja, middle, poses with Northern Marianas Protection and Advocacy Systems, Inc. (NMPASI) staff at the new office located in the Marianas Business Plaza in Susupe.

By **KIMBERLY B. ESMORES**  
[kimberly\\_esmores@saipantribune.com](mailto:kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com)  
REPORTER

**W**ith a passion to be a voice for those discriminated against, Greg Borja has devoted his entire life to advocating for individuals with disabilities, which is why he has been chosen as *Saipan Tribune's* 2023 Person of the Year.

Borja, who is the executive director of the Northern Marianas Protection and Advocacy Systems, Inc., has poured over 20 years of his life into advocating for individuals

with disabilities, which all got started because of his love for his family.

"I got into NMPASI primarily because I have family  
See **PERSON** on Page 4

## NOTICE

*Saipan Tribune* will not have any issue on Monday, Jan. 1, 2024 in observance of the New Year. Publication will resume on Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024.

## 2023 SMALL BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

### A tasty treat and scoop of CSR at Tyler's Gelatte Stone

By **CHRISTAL MARINO**  
[chrystal\\_marino@saipantribune.com](mailto:chrystal_marino@saipantribune.com)  
CORRESPONDENT

It's not just about serving an Italian treat with a local twist. Since opening in 2021 at the Sugar King Park, Tyler's Gelatte Stone has been heavily involved in

See **TASTY** on Page 4

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Tylers Gelatte Stone owner Benjamin Babauta.



## INSIDE

### LOCAL

The Commonwealth Healthcare Corp.'s Pediatrics Unit was the recipient of a generous donation of books and toys from the Taga Riders Motorcycle Club.

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### OFFBEAT

For better or for worse, a wave of couples saying "I do" in Las Vegas on New Year's Eve could set a record for the city's busiest wedding day ever.

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### LIFE & STYLE

A romance that united sports and music fans, a celestial wonder that drew millions of eyes skyward and a spiritual homecoming for some Native American tribes were just some of the moments that inspired us and brought joy in 2023.

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# Local

## Let's take a look back on the top stories of 2023



### IPI's court battles, controversies continue

The court battles of troubled Imperial Pacific International (CNMI) LLC in several civil cases both in local and federal courts continued throughout the year.

In fact, just last Wednesday IPI, through its new lawyers, Stephen J. Nutting and Michael Chen, filed another civil case against the Commonwealth Casino Commission in federal court, alleging that CCC is taking a judicial role in interpreting the Casino License Agreement. This, according to IPI, essentially deprives the company of its U.S. and CNMI constitutional rights.

Tomorrow, Saturday, is the deadline for IPI to pay the \$62

million in casino license fees it owes the CNMI government in the last four years. As of yesterday, Commonwealth Casino Commission board chair Edward C. DeLeon Guerrero confirmed that IPI has not paid yet.

If IPI fails to meet tomorrow's deadline, that matter would be discussed in a CCC executive session that day, DeLeon Guerrero said, because there will be further actions to enforce the CCC decision and orders.

It was CCC board vice chair Rafael S. Demapan who issued the 30-day notice of payment to IPI, after determining that a reasonable deadline for IPI to pay the 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023 casino license fees is 30 days from the receipt of the notice.

IPI's latest controversy happened last Nov. 23, when the Beijing Municipal First Intermediate People's Court reportedly ruled that Ji Xiaobo, the former executive of Macau junket firm, Hengsheng Group, and project manager for IPI, was deemed the head of a

See LET'S on Page 3

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**LET'S**

From page 2

criminal syndicate. (*Ferdie de la Torre*)

**DPW assesses CUC \$6.9 million for 110 alleged violations**

Acting Commonwealth Utilities Corp. executive director Betty G. Terlaje got a surprise last Aug. 4 when she received a sheaf of documents from the Department of Public Works Technical Services Division, informing her about civil fees and civil penalties assessed by DPW against CUC.

According to DPW, as of June 30, 2023, CUC owes the CNMI government \$6.9 million in fees for about 110 alleged violations that are mainly related to unpermitted road

cutting work.

Last April, DPW Secretary Ray N. Yumul issued a final notification to CUC over its alleged repeated violations of not restoring roads that it had cut up or dug up for its projects. Then-acting CUC executive director Dallas M. Peavey Jr. immediately informed Yumul that they're working to repair and replace roads that were damaged by CUC projects. He also disclosed that 16% of CUC road repairs are caused by DPW cutting into and/or through CUC water

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and sewer piping.

In order to address CUC's outstanding road cutting and trenching restoration work, civil fines and civil penalties owed DPW, Yumul recently requested Attorney General Edward Manibusan for assistance in assigning an Ad-

ministrative Hearing Officer as part of the administrative process. (*Ferdie de la Torre*)

**Camacho, Peavey, Voerg resign from CUC**  
Year 2023 saw the resignation of several top Commonwealth Utilities Corp. offi-

cials, including its long-time executive director, Gary P. Camacho.

As of yesterday, CUC has yet to hire an executive director as the search process continues. The position has been vacant since Feb. 21, 2023.

Camacho resigned from

his post on Feb. 21, on the same day when news reports surfaced that Gov. Arnold I. Palacios is determined to replace him.

Camacho told *Saipan Tribune* that he needs to take care of his health. He has worked at

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**DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS**  
**CNMI GOVERNMENT**  
**REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL**

**RFP NO.: DPW24-RFP No.: 42400019**

**SUBMISSION DATE: January 16, 2024 TIME: 10:00 A.M.**

**“Topographic and As-Built Survey of Natibu Recreational Sports Facilities, Precinct IV, Saipan”**

COPIES OF THE SPECIFICATIONS MAY BE OBTAINED AT THE TECHNICAL SERVICES DIVISION, DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS, LOCATED ON SECOND FLOOR, OLEAI JOETEN COMMERCIAL CENTER, SAN JOSE, SAIPAN, DURING REGULAR WORKING HOURS.

**THE PROVISIONS OF THE CNMI PROCUREMENT REGULATIONS, NMIAC SECTION 70-30.3-725 AND 70-30.3-730 PROHIBITING GRATUITIES, KICKBACKS AND CONTINGENT FEES SHALL APPLY.**

The project package will be available on or after **December 15, 2023** at Technical Services Division, Department of Public Works, located on Second Floor, Oleai Joeten Commercial Center, San Jose, Saipan.

There will be a **Pre-Proposal Conference** for this project on **January 04, 2024**, 9:00 a.m. local time at the Department of Public Works Conference Room 2nd Floor, Oleai Joeten Commercial Center Office, Saipan. The Prospective bidders are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the site. All question regarding this project must be submitted in writing no later than 4:30 p.m. local time on **January 11, 2024** to **Mr. Anthony A. Camacho, Director of Technical Services Division**, 2nd Floor, Oleai Joeten Commercial Center, Saipan or fax to (670) 234-3547. Response to questions shall be shared with prospective bidders.

THE CNMI GOVERNMENT RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REJECT ANY OR ALL BIDS, OR PORTIONS THEREOF, AND WAIVE IMMATERIAL DEFECTS IF TO DO SO WOULD BE IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE CNMI GOVERNMENT.

**/S/ RAY N. YUMUL**  
Secretary, DPW

**/S/ BRIEN SERS NICHOLAS JR.**  
Acting Director, Division of Procurement Services

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**PUBLIC NOTICE**

**From the**  
**COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS**  
**COASTAL MANAGEMENT PROGRAM**  
**of the DIVISION OF COASTAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT**

**DATE: December 29, 2023**

**NOTICE:** The Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality (BECQ) - Division of Coastal Resources Management (DCRM) is currently reviewing federal consistency submissions from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). More information about the determinations can be accessed on the DCRM website at the following links:

- 1) EPA's consistency determination for the proposed National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Pesticide General Permit (PGP) for discharges from the application of pesticides to waters of the US: <https://dcrm.gov.mp/wp-content/uploads/crm/CNMI-CZ-MA-EPA-NPDES-PGP-CD.pdf>
- 2) NMFS's consistency determination for the proposed annual catch limit (ACL) and annual catch target (ACT) of bottomfish management unit species in the CNMI: <https://dcrm.gov.mp/wp-content/uploads/crm/CNMI-CZMA-NMFS-BMUS-ACL-CD.pdf>
- 3) FAA's negative determination for the proposed replacement of the electrical line distribution system at Saipan Airport: <https://dcrm.gov.mp/wp-content/uploads/crm/CNMI-CZMA-FAA-GSN-ELD-Replacement-ND.pdf>

Federal consistency is a provision of the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) that requires federal actions that affect the CNMI coastal zone to be consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the enforceable policies of the CNMI's federally approved Coastal Management Program (CMP).

For more information, or to submit comments on whether the project is consistent with the enforceable policies of the CNMI CMP, please contact the Division of Coastal Resources Management at [fedcon@dcrm.gov.mp](mailto:fedcon@dcrm.gov.mp).

This public notice has been published for compliance with 15 CFR § 930.42. DCRM is soliciting public comments for fifteen (15) days, starting on December 29, 2023 and ending on January 13, 2024. We welcome your feedback and thank you for your consideration.

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## PERSON

From page 1

members with different types of disabilities. I have a son who grew up with a vision impairment, I have an uncle that I grew up with that has a mental illness. So being part of NMPASI is just my way of working with people [with disabilities] and to show the community that there is nothing wrong with having a disability. You can go through life with the proper support and encouragement. Anyone can do what they want to do, and they should not be held back by a disability,” he said.

Borja started off as an outreach specialist at NMPASI in 2002 and that set the trajectory for his nearly lifelong career of working with persons with disabilities, but it was his passion to be a voice for the vulnerable that eventually placed him at the helm of NMPASI nearly two years ago.

As an outreach specialist for NMPASI, he got his feet wet by giving presentations about issues that surround people with disabilities in the community. That was soon followed by direct work with clients, particularly people from Tinian and Rota, because those communities are traditionally underserved.

“We wanted to make sure that our services were readily available there also because everything that we get here on Saipan should go out to Tinian and Rota as well,” he said.

Borja was immersed in that position for about 19 years.

### What kept you going all these years?

Ultimately, what spurs Borja’s passion is seeing the smile on a person’s face when they’re able to accomplish something or they get something they are entitled to but were denied just because they are different.

“It’s really the joy I get when I help someone, especially someone who has been discriminated against because of a disability, or being the voice for someone who doesn’t know how to speak or ask an employer for accommodation to help them do better at their job. They come to NMPASI just because they need help,” he said. “I also like seeing barriers removed so that more people have access within our community, even if it’s just adding a ramp to a restaurant, or making the aisles larger at a store so people who use wheelchairs and walkers can get around more freely and be more independent in what they’re doing.”

He acknowledged that everyone at NMPASI is an advocate. “We’re representatives, supporters, helpers and that’s what we do,” he said.

### Challenges

Some of the challenges Borja has faced in the last 20 years are what he calls “teaching an old dog new tricks.” That largely involves changing the minds of people in the community to be more accepting and inclusive of people with disabilities.

“It can be frustrating when people don’t think that people with disabilities have equal right to places. Changing these mindsets are a challenge. But again, we’ve had instances where someone who doesn’t believe that blue parking spaces should strictly be for people with disabilities, yet they now are people with disabilities who need those spaces, and they now see the importance of those and why others shouldn’t park in them,” he said.

Another challenge is helping families truly accept family members who have a disability.

“We do see families who may be embarrassed or ashamed that they have a person with a disability in their family and they don’t bring them out in public. We need to break down that barrier and be accepting of your family. That’s why we host these awareness months, so we become more accepting of people with disabilities and accept them as equal members of our community,” he said.

### Community outreach

During his tenure, Borja has helped NMPASI implement a number of community outreach programs, among them the recently established Disabilities Sports Festival.

“One of the coolest outreach efforts that we do in collaboration with our Disabilities Network Partners, which includes like 10 other agencies, is hosting the Disabilities Sports Festival. That’s an opportunity for people with disabilities to participate in and socialize with others and get an opportunity to play sports that they may not be able to do out in the community or at school because maybe their physical disability doesn’t allow them to join a school team. This festival gives them an opportunity to participate in a sport as much as they would want to,” he said.

Another outreach program NMPASI holds is legal education for individuals with disabilities who may not know what rights they are entitled to. Because NMPASI is a legal agency, they primarily train individuals with disabilities about their rights and protections they have under different laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, among others.

“We let them know what

their rights are...but we also try to reach out to our community so that they are aware that there are laws that protect individuals with disabilities,” he said.

NMPASI also conducts educational outreach on laws like parking access and not parking in the blue spaces, which includes the access aisles. Borja said these outreach efforts are targeted mainly at members of the CNMI community.

“Sometimes next to a blue space, there is a striped space that is meant for individuals with disabilities to get down safely without having to be pinned up against another vehicle. Unfortunately, we get people who park on those and in the blue spaces, they block the access aisles. So just letting the community know that there are laws like that out there. And for some people, it educates them enough so they can help a family member or themselves because they were unaware of those kinds of laws,” he said.

### Anti-bullying comics

NMPASI also had an anti-bullying campaign in 2016 to educate students about their peers who have disabilities. NMPASI worked with students from Marianas High School on creating an anti-bullying comic book, with funding from the CNMI Humanities Council. They also included tips from the stop-bullying.org website about how to prevent bullying.

“We got students to write and illustrate four short stories about what it’s like for a person with disabilities who might experience bullying and what people can do to prevent that bullying from happening...It was well received. We made about 1,000 copies of that comic, and it was distributed primarily at MHS,” he said.

If permitted to do so again, Borja would like to launch another project similar to the anti-bullying comics.

“It would be nice to do that project again moving forward because that entailed us going into the school and talking to students about what disabilities are and making them aware of bullying. It’s also nice because students sometimes would rather read a comic book than a book. I guess our next step would be to make a cool video or something like that highlighting some of those scenarios,” he said.

### Relocation

In the past 20 years, NMPASI has relocated a few times to accommodate the growing population of individuals who seek NMPASI’s help, the most recent of which was back on Oct. 1 when they moved to Room 505 of the Marianas

Business Plaza.

“We wanted a location with ample parking that was accessible to our community. We were at our old location at Chalan Lau Lau for about 14 years before we moved to Gualo Rai and...that was because we needed to expand our office and we need a little more space. This new space provides us with a little more room for our advocates and for people who come in,” he said.

NMPASI moving to the Marianas Business Plaza also meant helping bring the building up to date in terms of compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

“...We are working with the owner of the Marianas Business Plaza to improve and create more accessible features throughout the establishment.

## TASTY

From page 1

the community, from creating events to promote other businesses and nonprofit organizations, as well as recognizing low-key community servants and trailblazers. In a way, it’s leading its contemporaries in the corporate social responsibility field.

The creamery’s Small Business Sundays, where they invite other small businesses to sell products and network at their location in Sugar King Park, has not only helped other small businesses gain customers but, according to Tyler’s Gelatte Stone owner and founder Ben Babauta, it also paved the way for the Most Badass People awards, where they recognize some of the unsung heroes of the community.

“Since doing Small Business Sundays, I’ve come across so many hardworking individuals, many risk takers, many ceiling breakers, who hardly get any recognition. So I decided that, instead of waiting for someone to recognize these individuals, I’ll recognize them myself,” he said. The Most Badass awarding ceremony this year was the first of its kind, and Babauta said they are looking forward to making it an annual event if funding and other factors permit.

Babauta understands some of the struggles and doubts other small business owners face, as he himself is one, and obstacles are very familiar sights.

“I faced a lot of obstacles, including running a business itself: seeing if the gelato/ice cream market would flourish on Saipan, sometime ingredients issues because of shipments from the vendors, and monthly expenses that came with the business,” he said.

The creamery itself was birthed during one of the

They have agreed to make the restrooms more accessible to people who use wheelchairs, put up appropriate signage on every floor, and more. Those are the things we are working on with the building owner. This gives the building owner the chance to bring their building up to date,” he said.

Since 2012, the ADA requires businesses that go through renovations or are newly constructed to comply with ADA requirements.

“Fortunately, the building owner is willing to work with us to ensure that he has a place that is accessible to people with disabilities and to the rest of our community,” Borja said.

### NMPASI’s goals

With the year coming to an end, Borja said NMPASI looks

forward to working on its goals for another 30 years: To provide representation to individuals with disabilities who have had their rights violated and to educate people with disabilities to be self-advocates and to educate the community on issues surrounding people with disabilities.

“We look forward to pushing forward with those two goals for another 30 years to make our community better and barrier-free for people with disabilities. The older we all get we’re going to need these accommodations and that accessibility as our bodies break down and we start having those mobility limitations. So, this is just something to look forward to—making our community a better place to live in in the future,” Borja said.

hardest times for small businesses. Babauta said he was introduced to gelato in 2020, when he and a friend visited a small gelato shop in Japan. He described the experience as “amazing,” prompting him to wonder why there isn’t a gelato shop on Saipan.

“So when I got back I ordered a home gelato maker and started to experiment. But it wasn’t until 2021 in January that I ordered a commercial gelato maker and it took months to get here,” he said.

He had just lost his job due to the COVID-19 pandemic “and a week later, the commercial gelato machine arrived. So I decided to go full force with opening the business. And that’s how Tyler’s Gelatte Stone was born,” he added.

The year 2023 was not without its share of obstacles. The road construction in the area made it difficult for people to access Sugar King Park this year and that has impacted foot traffic and their business. Yet, Tyler’s Gelatte Stone was able to host two Small Business Sundays and present the inaugural Most Badass awards of 2023.

Babauta said he draws motivation from his son, Tyler, who is the namesake of the shop, as well as people’s energy to do something for the community.

Among the events they will be involved in this coming year include the 2024 Marianas March Against Cancer and Miss Bikini Marianas 2024.

As for some shop improvements they’re looking forward to make

As for the shop, he said they are seeking to expand their menu in 2024. With dozens on social media posting their support and displaying pictures of the shop’s bussin Chamolinian Chocolate, Leche Lantiyas, Mange Mango, Dudus Dragon Fruit Sorbet, Nutella Brownie, Pikaru Pistachio, and more,

Babauta said they want to try out burgers.

“We are expanding, and looking to offer burgers at our shop. We have launched some days but we are looking to expand the menu,” he said.

If he could sum up the growth of Tyler’s Gelatte Stone in one word, Babauta said it would be “unconventional.”

“We started with selling gelatos, our gelato names are unconventional. Then hosting Small Business Sundays is unconventional. Then hosting an award show to honor and recognize young professionals in our community is unconventional. Selling burgers from a gelato shop is unconventional. And we love breaking barriers and pushing the limits of a small business on Saipan,” he said.

His message to other business owners and entrepreneurs? “Take the calculated risk! Find a mentor and learn from them. A customer will become a friend faster than a friend will become a customer.”

On a personal level he shared “Personally, I am involved with the community because I want to use my platform to give back to the community. It makes me feel good. I feel like if I could inspire people to give back or make a difference, it’ll keep going and our community will benefit from it.”

That unquenchable spirit to give back and help the community is what makes Ben Babauta and Tyler’s Gelatte Stone stand out. The shop continues to show true Marianas spirit, doing business while helping other small businesses and nonprofits along the way, not to mention highlighting the many other individuals who also show Marianas pride and spirit. For this reason and more, *Saipan Tribune* recognizes Ben Babauta and his Tyler’s Gelatte Stone the 2023 Small Business of the Year.



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LET'S

From page 3

CUC in different capacities for about 30 years.

It was in 2017 when U.S. District Court for the NMI designated judge David O. Carter waived the qualification requirement for the executive director's position and

approved Camacho's appointment for the position.

With Camacho's resignation, on Feb. 21 then-CUC board of directors chair pro tem Janice A. Tenorio desig-

nated deputy director for electric power systems Dallas M. Peavey Jr. as acting executive director.

Peavey's term, however, did not last long. Tenorio terminated Peavey's employment in April, for cause.

Peavey's termination came five days after he issued notices of disconnection to the Commonwealth Healthcare Corp. and Department of Public Works due to unpaid power and water services amounting to \$53.6 million and \$1.2 million as of March 31, 2023, respectively.

Tenorio informed Palacios and Lt. Gov. David M. Apatang that she and CUC's Human Resources staff became aware that Peavey had "exhibited dishonesty and a lack of candor" in his application to serve as deputy director for electric power systems.

According to online news report dated August 2022, an indictment was filed against Peavey in Texas for three felony charges involving falsification of travel expenses and invoices. He reportedly pleaded guilty to all charges. He received a deferred adjudication of guilty and was placed on provision for five years.

The case was subsequently dismissed in 2014 because Peavey had paid his restitution and probation fees.

With Peavey out, Tenorio appointed deputy executive director for water/wastewater Chretien T. Voerg as acting executive director. Two days after his appointment, Voerg too resigned from both positions as deputy executive director and as

acting executive director. (*Ferdie de la Torre*)

**Palacios takes oath as CNMI's 10th governor, Apatang as 13th lieutenant governor**

Arnold I. Palacios and David M. Apatang were sworn in last January as the CNMI's 10th governor and 13th lieutenant governor, respectively, at the Pedro P. Tenorio Multi-Purpose Center in Susupe. The ceremony lasted only about an hour and seven minutes, said to be the fastest gubernatorial inauguration in CNMI history.

Among the VIP guests were Delegate Aumua Amata Coleman Radewagen (R-AS), who is a member of the U.S. Congress representing American Samoa; Guam Gov. Lourdes A. Leon Guerrero; Palau President Surangel Whipps Jr., Chuuk Gov. Alexander R. Naruhn, and Philippine Consul General John U. Hilado.

Palacios said his administration intends to rebuild trust, restore confidence, and bring back integrity and credibility to the government.

Apatang said he and Palacios will immediately face a myriad of challenges, issues, demands, oppositions, and many more. He said they will look at these challenges in the eye and work together to resolve them. (*Ferdie de la Torre*)

**BOOST probe continues**

It was in July 2023 when then-House of Representatives acting speaker Joel C. Camacho (Ind-Saipan) created a special committee that will continue

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**DIVISION OF COASTAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT**

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**NOTICE OF APPLICATION**

As of December 29, 2023

THE FOLLOWING IS A PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT OF COASTAL PERMIT APPLICATIONS RECEIVED BY THE DCRM OFFICE:

APPLICANT	DATE APPLICATION RECEIVED	APPLICATION PROJECT DESCRIPTION	LOCATION	TYPE	STATUS
1. Aqua Gate, Inc.	12/13/023 SLR-2024-010	Commercial SCUBA Diving Tour Operations & Instruction	Garapan, Saipan	Lagoon & Reef	Approved* 12/18/2023
2. Saipan Crewboats, Inc.	12/14/2023 SPIm-2024-011	Dry-Dock (C/B Leatherneck)	Lowerbase, Saipan	Ports & Industrial	Approved* 12/18/2023
3. Buttonwood Corporation dba Pacific Star Diving Club	12/14/2023 SLR-2024-012	Commercial SCUBA Diving Tour Operations	All Designated Dive Sites, Saipan	Lagoon & Reef	Approved* 12/20/2023
4. Buttonwood Corporation dba Marianas Water Sports	12/14/2023 SLR-2024-013	Commercial Snorkeling Activities	Grotto & Managaha, Saipan & Managaha Island	Lagoon & Reef	Approved* 12/20/2023
5. Thanks Saipan Corporation	12/18/2023 SLR-2024-014	Dry-Dock	Lowerbase, Saipan	Ports & Industrial	Application Under Review*
6. Pacific Coastal Research & Planning	12/18/2023 SSPILR-2024-015	Salvage & Recovery (FV Charito Vessel)	Lowerbase, Saipan	Shoreline, Ports & Industrial, Lagoon & Reef	Application Under Review*
7. The Micronesian Telecommunications Corporation dba IT&E	12/19/2023 SSWPICH-2024-016	Fiber Optic/Copper Installation & Connection and Existing Telephone Cable Repair/Replacement	Island wide, Saipan	Shoreline, Wetlands & Mangrove, Ports & Industrial, Coastal Hazards	Application Under Review*
8. Chaoshan Qin	11/15/2023 RSm-2023-008	Demolition of Shoreline Pavilions	Tatachog/Miling Kattan, Rota	Shoreline	Approved* 12/13/2023
9. Chaoshan Qin	11/15/2023 RPIIm-2023-009	CPA Commercial Perimeter Fencing	West Harbor, Rota	Ports & Industrial	Approved* 12/13/2023

NMIA §15-10-210 of the CRM Rules and Regulations requires all permit applications to be published in a newspaper for general circulation within the CNMI within 15 days of receipt of application. The list reflects recently received permit applications and those with a recent change in status. New applications are marked with an asterisk (\*).

The Public is invited to submit written comments regarding any of the above projects for which a permit decision has not been issued. All permit comments should identify the project by application number. Your comments should be mailed or hand-delivered to the DCRM Office. All persons who desire a public hearing regarding any project may do so by submitting a written request for a public hearing to the DCRM Office within fourteen (14) days for minor permits (APCs) and proposed amended major sitings. Public Hearings are required for all new major siting projects. All public hearing notices are published in a local newspaper of general circulation. Residents of Rota and Tinian may submit comments and hearing requests to their local DCRM Coordinator. Persons wishing to retain the right to appeal a DCRM Permit decision must file a notice of appeal with the DCRM office within thirty (30) days of the issuance of the DCRM permit decision as provided in Part 200 § 15-10-235 of the DCRM Regulations.



2024

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## LET'S

From page 6

the investigation into the previous administration's controversial Building Optimism, Opportunity and Stability Together, or BOOST Program, as well as the CNMI's expenditure of American Rescue Plan Act funds.

Rep. Ralph N. Yumul (Ind-Saipan) was appointed chair of the Special Committee on Federal Assistance and Disaster Related Funding. Floor leader Rep. Edwin K. Propst (D-Saipan) was appointed vice chair.

As of yesterday, the special committee has yet to start the formal hearings, although it issued letters and served subpoenas to several people and companies involved in the BOOST Program.

Yesterday, the special committee members agreed to issue a subpoena to get some documents from the local media—*Saipan Tribune*, *Marianas Variety*, and *KKMP*.

Propst, who presided over the meeting, included KSPN2 among the media outfits that would be subpoenaed.

Propst said that since the media companies are private entities, summoning them with subpoenas is a normal route to take and that it doesn't suggest any wrong-

doing on their part.

He said the media entities of course were paid for the work they did and that the committee would like to find out exactly what is owed these outlets and what was asked of them to perform. House legal counsel Joseph Tajeron emphasized that these media entities have been particularly transparent with the committee and have conducted straightforward and legal conduct. Tajeron stressed that the subpoena is not something that they want to do but that's the only legal avenue available to the committee because the letters that they usually issue are for government entities alone.

The special committee was created after Rep. Marissa Renee Flores (Ind-Saipan), who chairs the House Committee on Judiciary and Governmental Operations, disclosed that her committee agreed that it would not conduct additional legislative hearings regarding the BOOST Program, given that several criminal investigations into the program have already been initiated.

The Ways and Means and the JGO Committees of the 22nd House jointly conducted several legislative fact-finding hearings that resulted "in the discovery of unprecedented levels of corruption and fiscal mismanagement relating to federal funds." The committees recommended that the current 23rd Legislative continue the BOOST probe.

Using \$17 million in ARPA money, BOOST was a project of the previous Office of the Governor, Department of Finance, and Department of Commerce. It aimed to provide financial assistance to CNMI businesses and non-profit organizations, but some lawmakers alleged that it was used by the previous administration to gain votes in the 2022 gubernatorial election and enrich the previous administration's cronies. **(Ferdie de la Torre)**

### Palacios pivots from China market; Kilili supports EVS-TAP for Chinese tourists

With geopolitical tensions between China and the United States growing since the COVID-19 pandemic, Gov. Arnold I. Palacios announced his intent to pivot the CNMI away from its reliance on the Chinese tourism market, which was the Commonwealth's second largest market prior to the pandemic. However, the Commonwealth Ports Authority and the Marianas Visitors Authority have underscored the need to get back the Chinese tourists to revitalize the CNMI economy.

Matters became more complicated when four U.S. senators and 28 U.S. House

members requested U.S. Department of Homeland Security last November to revoke the discretionary parole program that allows DHS to let Chinese tourists enter the CNMI without a tourist visa.

In response to the U.S. lawmakers' action, the Saipan Chamber of Commerce and Hotel Association of the Northern Mariana Islands urged Palacios and other government leaders to back the creation and implementation of the proposed CNMI Economic Vitality & Security Travel Authorization Program, or EVS-TAP, that according to them will address concerns about the discretionary parole program, while promoting the CNMI's economic growth.

The proposed EVS-TAP will allow prescreened People's Republic of China nationals to travel to the CNMI without a visa under specific conditions.

The Senate recently adopted a Senate joint resolution authored by Sen. Jude U. Hofschneider (R-Tinian) to request Palacios to advocate for the promulgation of the rules governing EVS-TAP.

Delegate Gregorio Kilili C. Sablan (D-MP) has also urged DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas to move forward on the rule-making process for the EVS-TAP.

House of Representatives Speaker Edmund S. Villagomez (Ind-Saipan) early this week referred Hofschneider's joint resolution to the House Commerce and Tourism Committee. **(Ferdie de la Torre)**

### Touchback rule implemented

The touchback provision that would require long-time foreign workers in the CNMI to exit the Commonwealth before the third consecutive renewal of their CNMI-Only Transitional Worker permit, or CW-1 visa, was officially implemented in September.

The rule, as enforced by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, resulted in the expected exit of thousands of foreign workers, who will have to wait in their home countries for USCIS to approve their CW-1 visas first before they are allowed into the CNMI.

Weeks before the September deadline, the CNMI Department of Labor launched a survey among private and government agencies that employ CW-1 workers in an attempt to gain a clearer picture of the impact of the touchback provision. Unfortunately, less than 20 agencies participated in the survey.

Organizations like the Saipan Chamber of Commerce, as well as the CNMI administration continue to appeal to the U.S. Congress to modify or even

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In the spirit of unfolding chapters, our team  
at *Saipan Tribune* extends sincere wishes for a

Happy  
New Year

filled with captivating stories, genuine connections,  
and the joy of shared news!

Hafa Adai!

Saipan Tribune

THE CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER



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# Opinion

Hafa Adai!

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AP The Associated Press

Pacific Islands News Association

### EDITORIAL

## State of disorder: Texas Gov. Greg Abbott's latest demagoguery on migrants

**T**exas Gov. Greg Abbott is up to it again, signing an unlawful new state law to make crossing into the country illegally a state misdemeanor. We don't expect it to last much beyond when the ink has dried.

Regular readers might recall that, for well more than a year now, we've been warning that Abbott's immigration demagoguery wouldn't stop and in fact would only intensify as long as he faced few consequences for it. New Yorkers are probably most familiar with his busing of thousands of migrants north to the city, arguably the genesis of the broader wave of arrivals that has come to dominate political life here.

The stunt was done without any real coordination or notice because, from the start, the governor didn't care one bit about the health and safety of the real human beings on those buses, including many families with children, instead seeing them as opportune tools for his posturing.

Yet that was far from Abbott's first border antic, and this recent move to wrest away control of immigration away from the federal government—for many reasons the only level that legally has a policymaking and regulatory role—has plenty of precedent.

His insistence on inspecting commercial vehicles coming into the state from Mexico this April—in partial duplication of the inspections already done by federal customs personnel whose job it actually is to do so—snarled trade with our largest trade partner and almost triggered an international incident. Undeterred by the fiasco, he did it again a month later.

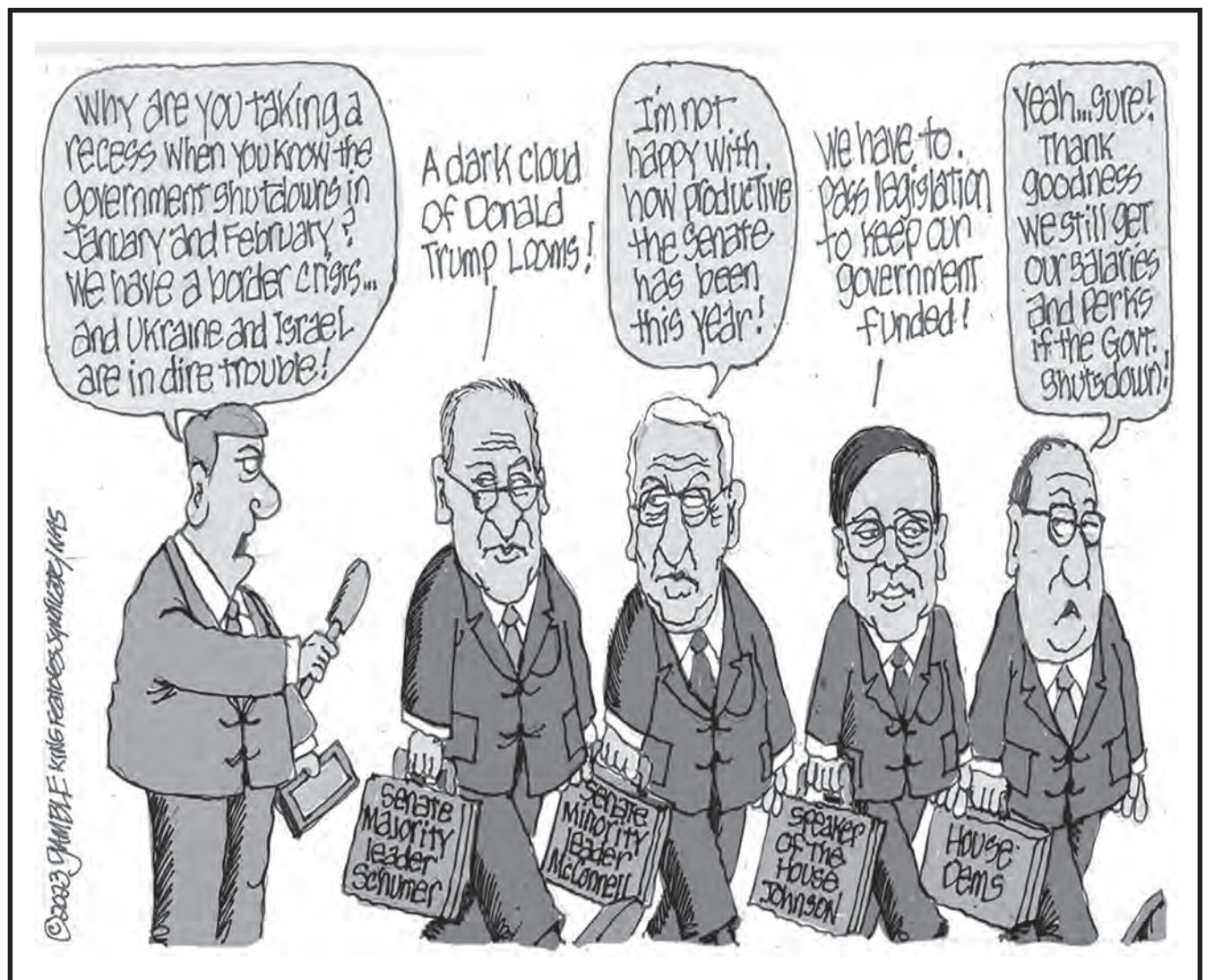
His Operation Lone Star began in 2021 as a series of state law enforcement and National Guard deployments to the border region, largely for show but occasionally to arrest migrants on the strained reasoning of trespassing on private property. The effort quickly became a disaster, leading to the suicide deaths of several troops, but Abbott just expanded it further, eventually adding buoys and razor wire that seemed designed to maim or kill migrants, and which eventually appear to have fulfilled that purpose.

At least that time the federal government took action, suing Abbott and eventually getting an appeals court to order him to take down his floating barrier, but the man in Austin just keeps churning out his drivel.

Let's be crystal clear that no state has any conceivable ground to stand on in attempting to criminalize entry without federal inspection. Similar state laws, including some infamously passed in Arizona more than a decade ago, were struck down.

Texas' attempt will turn out no differently, because for a century and a half, the ability to regulate immigration has been vested exclusively in the federal government, a fact that probably wouldn't bother Abbott much if it cut in the other direction; we imagine that if Gov. Hochul set up her own checkpoints along

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## Here's what 2024 might look like ...

**2**024 looms as a very volatile year. Here is what might happen—or maybe not:

**JANUARY**—Alabama defeats Washington for college football national championship. Supreme Court overturns Colorado's ouster of Donald Trump from GOP primary ballot but rejects Trump's argument that he has immunity from criminal prosecution. Former president easily wins Iowa caucuses, but Ron DeSantis does better than expected and claims the "Big Mo." In New Hampshire primary stunner, independents help Nikki Haley edge Trump, with Chris Christie third and DeSantis fourth. Trump claims fraud. President Joe Biden wins Democrats' nonbinding primary on write-ins but with only 58%. Congress fails to renew government spending, shutting six agencies. Israel declares victory in war against Hamas.

**FEBRUARY**—Speaker Mike Johnson averts full-scale shutdown by accepting another bipartisan funding measure, including aid for Ukraine, Israel, Taiwan and the border. Conservative critics introduce resolution to oust him, but it fails, due to Democratic abstentions. Despite protest from San Francisco 49ers, Taylor Swift is picked to sing national anthem at Super Bowl. Kansas City Chiefs beat Niners on last-minute pass to Travis Kelce; in post-game interview, he proposes to Swift. Trump routs Haley in South Carolina primary; DeSantis, a distant third, drops out. Biden approval hits new low at 31%.

**MARCH**—With Super Tuesday victories in California, Massachusetts, Texas and eight other states, Trump extends lead over Haley. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ousted, replaced by opposition leader Benny Gantz. Trump clinches GOP nomination with victories in Arizona, Florida, Illinois and Ohio as his trial for his role in the Jan. 6 insurrection begins in Washington. New York jury convicts Trump of paying "hush money" to former porn star before 2016 election.

**APRIL**—Washington jury convicts Trump on three of four counts; Trump claims vindication in acquittal (and appeals the three convictions). His lead over Biden increases to 8 points. Pro-Trump hackers disrupt No Labels virtual convention, giving most votes to Russian President Vladimir Putin. Group awards its nomination to second place finisher Liz Cheney. Across-the-board government spending cuts take effect as Congress fails to resolve its year-long impasse; House Republicans celebrate.

**MAY**—Hunter Biden convicted in California on two counts of income tax evasion. President Biden abruptly abandons his re-election bid. "I do not believe that I should devote an hour or a day of my time to any personal partisan causes," he says,

**By CARL P. LEUBSDORF**  
The Dallas Morning News

Carl P. Leubsdorf is the former Washington bureau chief of the Dallas Morning News. Readers may write to him via email at [carl.p.leubsdorf@gmail.com](mailto:carl.p.leubsdorf@gmail.com).



citing situations in Ukraine and the Middle East. California Gov. Gavin Newsom promptly announces candidacy. Biden says he won't endorse a successor. That leaves the choice to Democratic delegates, most already selected as Biden supporters. Trump condemns decision as anti-democratic.

**JUNE**—Initial Democratic delegate polls show a wide-open race among Vice President Kamala Harris, Newsom and Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer. Congress deadlocks on spending levels for the year starting Oct. 1. Her fellow Great Lakes states Democratic governors endorse Whitmer to head Democratic ticket. Top House Democrats back Harris, while most Senate Democrats support Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar. Toronto Maple Leafs win Stanley Cup; Milwaukee Bucks capture NBA title.

**JULY**—Polls show Harris, Klobuchar and Whitmer all beating Trump. At Republican National Convention in Milwaukee, Trump spurns runner-up Nikki Haley as an "ultra-moderate RINO (Republican in name only)," picks moderate-turned-MAGA enthusiast New York Rep. Elise Stefanik as his running mate. GOP platform backs Trump's priorities: repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, complete the border wall, round up illegal immigrants, enact more corporate tax cuts, revamp the "deep state civil service" and end the "Biden politicization" of the Justice Department.

**AUGUST**—In the first contested presidential nomination since 1952, the Democratic National Convention in Chicago chooses Whitmer on the third ballot. She picks Georgia Sen. Raphael Warnock as her running mate. Biden and Harris back ticket, join traditional platform unity celebration after Whitmer's acceptance speech lists Cabinet choices, including Harris as attorney general. Liz Cheney drops out and endorses Whitmer.

**SEPTEMBER**—First post-convention poll shows Whitmer leading Trump by 3 points with independent candidate Robert Kennedy Jr. at 18%. Trump announces he will participate in

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**EDITORIAL POLICY**

Letters to the editor must include the NAME, VILLAGE ADDRESS, and CONTACT NUMBER of the contributor. Letters that do not have these information will immediately be trashed. Contributions consisting of 500 words or less have more chances of getting published. The *Saipan Tribune* reserves the right to publish a contribution or not; the right to edit submissions for length, accuracy, and clarity; and the right to publish and distribute contributions in print, electronic, or other media formats. Submissions may be sent via snail mail to the 2nd Floor, JP Center, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan, 96950; fax (670) 235-3740; e-mail to [editor@saipantribune.com](mailto:editor@saipantribune.com); or through our website at [www.saipantribune.com](http://www.saipantribune.com).

## Rota Marathon: A ray of hope

**O**n Jan. 13, 2024, the first ever Rota Marathon will be staged, drawing athletes and media attention to this stunning gem of an island in The Marianas archipelago.

The idea for a Rota Marathon took root at the Marianas Visitors Authority just a few months ago, where my proposal quickly gained support from both our division managers on the ground and our board. Based on our extensive experience with organizing other marathons and sporting events, we felt confident that a marathon would be the most strategic and efficient event we could host annually. After all, any traveler can easily pack a pair of running shoes. Having an actual event would be an exciting addition to—and a periodic focal point for—the ongoing island-specific marketing and promotions that the MVA has made of Rota (and Tinian) for a number of years now.

Despite its exquisite offerings for travelers, we all know the dire state of Rota's tourism. Yet the island has exactly what many of today's travelers are seeking—pristine nature, the opportunity to connect with the local community, authentic culture, and a place to rejuvenate the mind, body, and spirit. All this and more, Rota offers 365 days a year.

The single biggest inhibitor to the growth of Rota's tourism is its high-priced air service. As has been said many times before, affordable, frequent, and reliable interisland air service is the only way to increase visitor arrivals to both Rota and Tinian. We thank STAR Marianas for their support of extended flight hours during events like our annual Tinian Hot Pepper Festival. The same for Rota would be a tremendous boost for the Rota Marathon. In the meantime, charter flights are available for groups. And with this fiscal year's reinstatement of Public Law 18-1 and hotel occupancy tax allotments to the MVA and the municipalities, the municipalities are legally authorized and have the sole discretion

to use those funds for their own tourism-related activities, including support for charter flights. This opens new opportunities for making it more affordable to fly to the islands through programs created by the municipalities. We've recently heard from travel agents in Korea that there is interest in developing tour packages for Rota if more flights at affordable rates can be offered, so we strongly support the use of the funds toward this purpose.

As we move into the final weeks now of preparation, we are working strategically to make this first Rota Marathon a successful one, with a reasonable number of participants, a well-managed and safe race, and—something Rota does better than anyone—a real opportunity for off-island visitors to connect with the people, the land, and the indigenous culture. There are many steps needed to grow this event over time to its full potential, but these three factors are fundamental to start. After Jan. 13, we will sit down and assess the event for cost-effectiveness and the potential of its continued viability.

On that note, it's appropriate to recognize some of the sponsors and supporters who are making Rota tourism their business by partnering with us to make the marathon a success. First and foremost, Mayor

Aubry Hocog and the Rota Legislative Delegation—Senate Vice President Donald Manglona, Sen. Paul Manglona, Sen. Dennis Mendiola, and Rep. Julie Ogo. Thank you to Valentino Hotel for donating hotel rooms to make the trip more affordable for off-island athletes. We know we can always count on the Rota community for their friendliness and hospitality toward visitors—that will be one of the highlights for participants. Si Yu'us ma'ase and olomwaay, all.

It's not too late to join us in launching what we hope will be a longstanding event for The Marianas and for Rota. We've strategically placed it on the holiday weekend of Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Registration rates are only \$40 for the full

**Joining the inaugural Rota Marathon is going to be more than just another marathon, another half-marathon, or another 5K. ... You can look at it as an investment and a sign of support for the Rota community, the recovery of its tourism economy, and our continued development of The Marianas as a multi-island destination.**

### MAKING TOURISM OUR BUSINESS

**By CHRISTOPHER A. CONCEPCION**

Special to the Saipan Tribune

*Christopher A. Concepcion is the managing director of the Marianas Visitors Authority.*



marathon and \$20 for the 5K. For that, you'll get a Limited Edition Official Rota Marathon T-shirt, Rota Marathon medal, and one entry to the awards banquet to be held at 6pm on race day. And we all know how Rota serves up an island banquet...delicious! For the rest, we've got attractive cash prizes. And we're giving group rates, too.

Joining the inaugural Rota Marathon is going to be more than just another marathon, another half-marathon, or another 5K (as you choose). You can look at it as an investment and a sign of support for the Rota community, the recovery of its tourism economy, and our continued development of The Marianas a multi-island destination. Taking to the starting line at Rota Roundhouse in Songsong and traversing the quiet, scenic roadways of the island will leave each participant with a unique sense of satisfaction. We're betting our money on it.

Registration forms and more details are available on The Marianas Calendar at [www.mymarianas.com/the-marianas-calendar](http://www.mymarianas.com/the-marianas-calendar). Nature's Treasure Island awaits you. See you on Rota!

### HERE'S

From page 10

debate commission's debates. Kennedy qualifies for the first debate. DeSantis challenges legality of abortion initiative on ballot in Florida. In debate, Kennedy echoes Trump's attacks. Congress fails to approve spending past Sept. 30. President Biden wins Nobel Peace Prize for "standing up for democracy."

**OCTOBER**—Another month, another government shutdown. Florida Supreme Court rejects DeSantis plea to stop abortion initiative. Kennedy's support drops sharply after debate. Trump says he won't debate any more. Warnock-Stefanik debate draws highest rating of any vice presidential debate in history. Putin says Russian people look forward to "return of President Trump." Yankees win Game 7 of World Series on a Juan Soto home run off the Dodgers' Yoshinobu Yamamoto. House reluctantly extends spending authority to Jan. 31, 2025.

**NOVEMBER**—Whitmer elected first woman president, 333-205, carrying Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin and—thanks to big turnout spurred by abortion initiative—Florida. Kennedy votes help Whitmer carry New Hampshire. Trump refuses to concede. Democrats regain House and, with an upset victory in Florida, retain 51-seat Senate majority. House GOP ousts outgoing Speaker Johnson as their leader, names Ohio Rep. Jim Jordan. Sen. Mitch McConnell steps down as Senate Republican leader, succeeded by South Dakota Sen. John Thune.

**DECEMBER**—Democrats elect New York Rep. Hakeem Jeffries as first Black speaker. Putin accuses Ukraine of resisting peace talks. Yankees reach 15-year, \$600 million extension with Soto. Trump rejects Electoral College verdict, vows to "fix things" in 2028. DeSantis says he is reconsidering his abortion position. Vivek Ramaswamy becomes first 2028 GOP hopeful to visit Iowa. Swift accepts Kelce's proposal.

### STATE

From page 10

the Canadian border with laxer entry standards than those required by federal law, Abbott would be screaming.

Of course, Abbott knows this, and he doesn't really care because he wins either way. Either the law stands and he gets to use more state power against helpless migrants, or it gets struck down and he gets to get rabble-rouse about how his tough-on-immigrants plans are getting foiled by liberal judges. Everyone else, of course, loses.

## Response to Norita's statement regarding utilities funding

*Editor's Note: The following is a statement issued yesterday by the office of Tinian and Aguiguan Mayor Edwin P. Aldan:*

**I**n response to the recent statement made by the Finance secretary regarding Tinian's financial status and its ability to pay for utility costs, the municipality would like to clarify and address several key points made by the secretary.

It is unfortunate that, instead of finding solutions to address the funding shortfall for utilities for Executive Branch agencies on Tinian, which fall within the purview and the responsibility of the Executive Branch, the secretary of Finance and the administration continues to double down on misinforming the public about this issue and failing to live up to its obligation.

Despite numerous documented communications and having provided the administration with a full accounting and a detailed breakdown of American Rescue Plan Act funds transferred to Tinian by the previous administration, it is apparent at this point that this administration has no interest in either the facts or finding solutions to address an issue which will impact the delivery of critical government services on Tinian.

The funds transferred to the municipality by the former administration were allocated to cover the Tinian Mayors' Office's current obligations and encumbrances for the remaining months of fiscal year 2023 and the first quarter of fiscal year 2024. These funds have been allocated to cover personnel and operations for the Tinian Mayor's Office. Deviating from the current allocations will jeopardize continued employment of Tinian Mayor's Office staff. It will also jeopardize critical public programs and services

**By EDWIN P. ALDAN**

Special to the Saipan Tribune

*Edwin P. Aldan is mayor of the Municipality of Tinian and Aguiguan.*

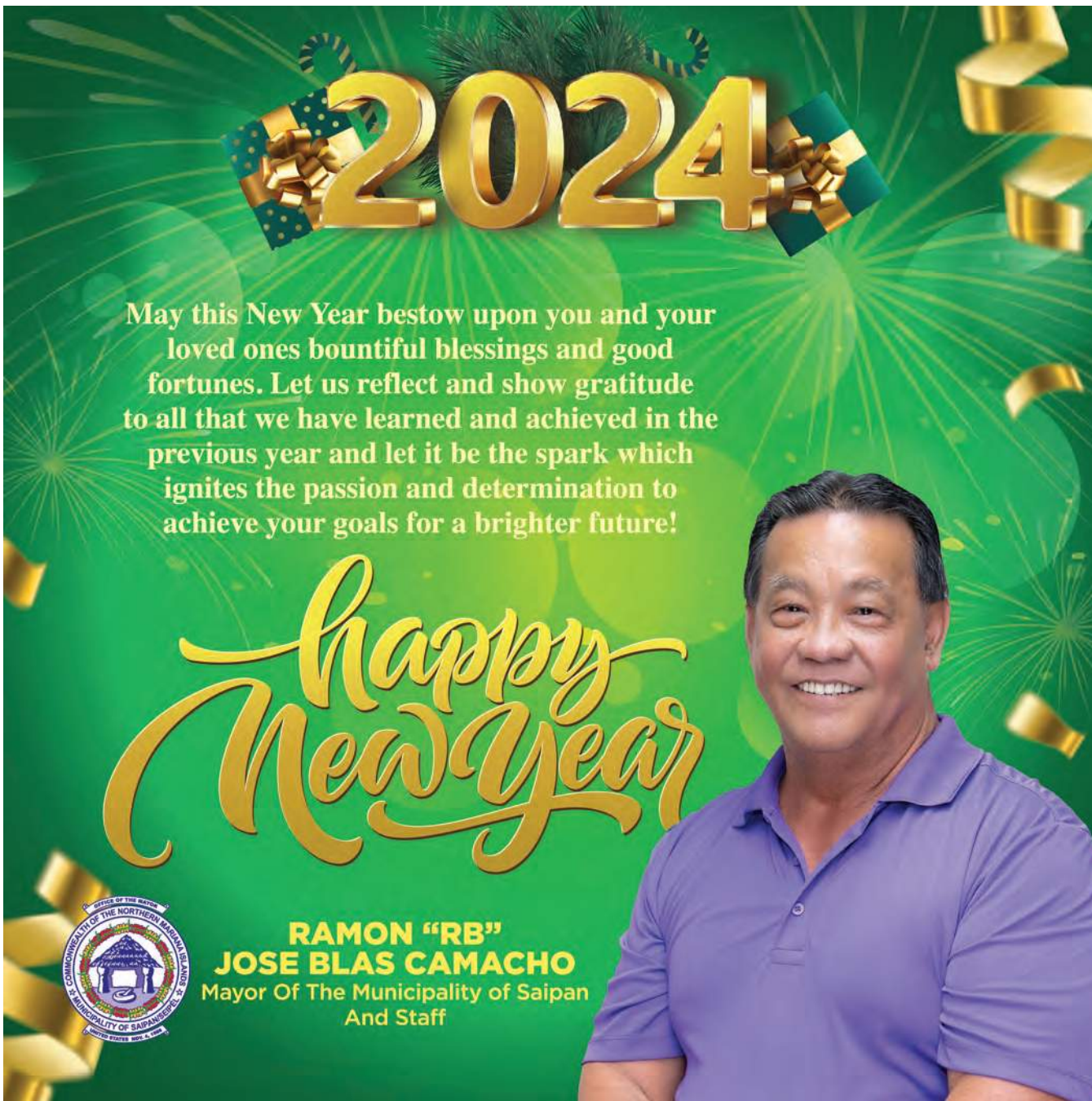


as most of these agencies are underfunded and rely on the Tinian Mayor's Office to assist with operational costs such as fuel for vehicles, which maintain public facilities and roads at a time when Tinian has not seen its share of Hotel Occupancy Tax funds.

Throughout the budget hearings, I have consistently expressed that these funds were insufficient to cover the cost of utilities for executive branch agencies. This stance was communicated to the governor, the secretary of Finance, and the Office of Management and Budget special assistant at the Governor's Council Meeting for the fiscal year 2024 budget on April 27, 2023, and to the House and Senate members during the House Ways and Means and the Senate Fiscal Affairs budget hearings, including the conference committee.

It is regrettable that the secretary of Finance continues to reference the \$3 million transfer of funds and making statements that do not accurately reflect what has transpired and has been communicated to her, the governor and to the Legislature. But more importantly, it is regrettable that this administration continues to turn its back on the people of Tinian.





May this New Year bestow upon you and your loved ones bountiful blessings and good fortunes. Let us reflect and show gratitude to all that we have learned and achieved in the previous year and let it be the spark which ignites the passion and determination to achieve your goals for a brighter future!

**Happy New Year**

**RAMON "RB" JOSE BLAS CAMACHO**  
Mayor Of The Municipality of Saipan  
And Staff



**Here's to what's to come in**

**2024**

**may it be filled with prosperity and success!**

- From the staff and management

We will close Dec. 31st at 9pm and re-open New Year's day at 10:30am to serve you

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## LET'S

From page 8

repeal the touchback provision since a large chunk of the CNMI workforce is made up of CW-1 workers. **(Kimberly B. Esmores)**

### CPA fees reach an all-time high; flights/tourist arrivals down

Cornered by a drastic drop in revenue due to the lack of air traffic, the Commonwealth Ports Authority's board was forced in October to increase airport fees to an all-time high, by as much as a whopping 90% increase in landing fees and a 79% increase in terminal rental fees.

With the newly adopted budget, the CPA terminal rental rates for the Francisco C. Ada/Saipan International Airport's main terminal went up from \$19.49 per square foot to \$34.92. Meanwhile, the terminal rental rates for all CNMI commuter terminals is now \$13.97 from \$7.79.

As for landing fees, with the 90% increase, CPA now charges international airline carriers \$15.25 per thousand pounds of certified maximum gross landing weight of the aircraft; they were previously being charged \$8.01. As for the CNMI commuter terminals, the 90%-increase brought landing fees up from \$4.81 to \$9.15.

The CPA board also adopted an eight-hour cut for all CPA employees and suspended its airline incentive program.

In addition, CPA also increased the current parking rate at the Saipan airport parking lot.

These massive increases have resulted in airlines becoming reluctant to fly to Saipan. Currently the CNMI only has United Airlines, Jeju Airlines, T'Way Airlines, and Asiana Airlines flying to Saipan.

According to the Marianas Visitors Authority's representative in South Korea, flights have been reluctant to return to Saipan as the increase in airport fees brings the cost of flying to Saipan up about \$3,000 per flight.

MVA's Japan office has reported the same concern. **(Kimberly B. Esmores)**

### Over \$1.8M worth of meth intercepted

Back in September, the Division of Customs and Bi-security intercepted 10 lbs of methamphetamine that was smuggled into the island through the U.S. Post Office in the form of eight glitter lava lamps.

The value of the meth stored in these lava lamps, based on the weight and the street value per gram of the substance, totaled over \$1.8 million.

Yang Liang in October

pleaded guilty to attempting to smuggle the meth through lava lamps into the CNMI through USPS. He faces a possible maximum sentence of 20 years. **(Kimberly B. Esmores)**

### MSA flies away

The Palacios-Apatang terminated in February the CNMI's \$8-million sole-source contract with the startup interisland airline Marianas Southern Airways, citing a lack of funding.

After months of trying to work out a deal between the CNMI administration and MSA, MSA finally closed up shop on Saipan and withdrew its flights. **(Kimberly B. Esmores)**

### Torres criminal suit continues

The criminal suit against former governor Ralph DLG Torres—alleging 12 counts of misconduct in public office and one count of theft—continues with the Office of the Attorney General enlisting off-island lawyer James Kingman to lead the prosecution against Torres.

Kingman in November filed a new lawsuit against Torres in Superior Court charging him with contempt anew for his failure to comply with a legislative subpoena.

The initial contempt charge against Torres was dismissed by judge *pro tem* Alberto Tolentino back in August. **(Kimberly B. Esmores)**

### Cop's loose gun leads to accidental shooting

A Department of Public Safety Officer was arrested in May after the police determined that his service firearm was allegedly used in an incident where a minor was accidentally shot in the face in Kagman.

The case of DPS officer Raymond Lizama Saralu, whose service firearm is believed to have been the gun used in the Kagman shooting, is set for a jury trial in 2024.

According to the complaint against Saralu, the evidence found at the scene may have been tampered with as the gun that was allegedly determined to have been used in the shooting was found in a laundry basket and covered with clothes while another gun was found on the floor near the minor who had been shot. **(Kimberly B. Esmores)**

### DPS responds to multiple threats

The Department of Public Safety responded to multiple threats this year.

Back in September, the department responded to back-to-back shooting threats at the Hopwood Middle School and Francisco M. Sablan Middle School.

See LET'S on Page 13



**LET'S**

From page 12

DPS also responded to a bomb threat at Cha Cha Oceanview Middle School that same month.

In November, DPS responded to a bomb threat at FMS where a student was arrested. The suspect in the incident was not related to the September incident. (*Kimberly B. Esmores*)

**Former BMV chief convicted for involvement in license fraud scheme**

Former Department of Public Safety Bureau of Motor Vehicle director Juana Leon Guerrero was indicted by a federal grand jury in March on the charge of conspiracy to unlawfully produce an identification document.

The former BMV chief later pleaded guilty to the charges filed against her.

In December, U.S. District Court for the NMI Chief Judge Ramona V. Manglona sentenced Leon Guerrero to five years in prison and three years' probation. (*Kimberly B. Esmores*)

**PSS chief Ada abruptly resigns**

Education Commissioner Alfred B. Ada abruptly re-

signed from his post at the Public School System in August 2023, citing health reasons. He said he was advised by his physician to step away from taking on more responsibilities so he could focus on getting better.

The subject became mired in controversy, though, when allegations surfaced that a PSS employee had accused Ada of sexual harassment and other unprofessional conduct. Five individuals allegedly expressed readiness to testify against him, although they had not filed their personal grievances prior.

It was also stated that allegations being raised against Ada cover a period of time, the latest of which dates to 2022 and the earliest dating back to 2003.

Ada denied the allegations, saying his track record over the past decades "stands as a testament" to his dedication, integrity, and commitment. He appealed to the media and the public to respect his privacy and refrain from speculations.

After working in PSS for 30 years, with the last three-and-a-half years in the role of education commissioner, Ada's resignation took effect on Sept. 1, 2023. He was appointed in December 2019. (*Chrystal Marino*)

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**2024**

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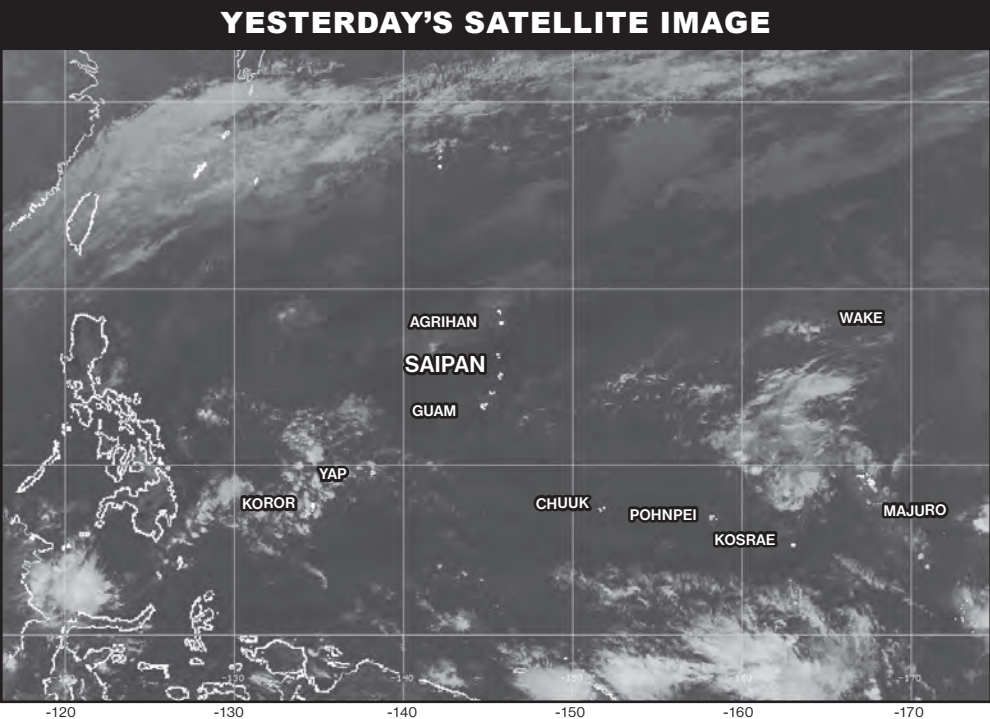
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# The Weather

5-DAY FORECAST FOR SAIPAN AND TINIAN									
TODAY		SATURDAY		SUNDAY		MONDAY		TUESDAY	
Breezy. Partly cloudy with isolated showers. Northeast winds 15 to 25 mph.		Breezy. Partly cloudy with isolated showers. Northeast winds 15 to 25 mph.		Partly sunny with a 20 percent chance of showers.		Partly sunny with a 20 percent chance of showers and thunderstorms.		Partly cloudy with a 20 percent chance of showers.	
86	77°	86	77°	86	77°	86	77°	86	77°



PICTURE TIME: 7:33 AM THURSDAY, DECEMBER 28, 2023

Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

Satellite shows partly sunny skies in the Marianas this morning, with only a few showers up north and low-end scattered showers toward the south. The buoys reveal combined seas of 6 to 8 feet composed of a medium size east swell, a small north swell, and east wind waves.

Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam homepage: <https://www.weather.gov/gum/>

MICRONESIA			▲▼°F
Guam and Rota	Windy	86° / 78°	
Palau	Thunderstorms	84° / 78°	
Yap	Showers	86° / 80°	
Chuuk	Thunderstorms	85° / 79°	
Pohnpei	Showers	85° / 78°	
Kosrae	Showers	85° / 78°	
Majuro	Partly Cloudy	85° / 81°	

DAY	SUNRISE	SUNSET
Today	6:41 AM	5:55 PM
Saturday	6:42 AM	5:56 PM
Sunday	6:42 AM	5:56 PM
Monday	6:42 AM	5:57 PM
Tuesday	6:43 AM	5:58 PM

DAY	MOONRISE	MOONSET	MOONRISE
Today	-	8:26 AM	7:53 PM
Saturday	-	9:10 AM	8:45 PM
Sunday	-	9:50 AM	9:35 PM
Monday	-	10:27 AM	10:22 PM
Tuesday	-	11:00 AM	11:08 PM

AROUND THE GLOBE			▲▼°F
Auckland	Windy	70° / 63°	
Beijing	Sunny	36° / 18°	
Hong Kong	Cloudy	68° / 64°	
Honolulu	Mostly Sunny	79° / 72°	
London	Partly Cloudy	39° / 30°	
Los Angeles	Sunny	67° / 45°	
Manila	Sunny	84° / 73°	
Melbourne	Mostly Sunny	104° / 61°	
Miami	Mostly Sunny	80° / 73°	
New York	Showers	44° / 41°	
Osaka	Sunny	52° / 39°	
Paris	Partly Cloudy	43° / 30°	
Busan	Sunny	48° / 34°	
Rome	Sunny	45° / 28°	
Salem	Rain	62° / 55°	
San Francisco	Sunny	54° / 43°	
Seoul	Sunny	41° / 19°	
Tokyo	Partly Cloudy	48° / 34°	
Washington, DC	Showers	48° / 34°	

TIDES: SAIPAN HARBOR TODAY			FEET
3:05 AM	Low Tide	-0.59	
10:27 AM	High Tide	1.64	
3:46 PM	Low Tide	1.11	
8:04 PM	High Tide	1.57	

**NEWS DESK** For news tips, corrections and requests for news coverage, call (670) 235-NEWS (6397), 235-2440, fax 235.3740. E-mail: [editor@saipantribune.com](mailto:editor@saipantribune.com). Website:[www.saipantribune.com](http://www.saipantribune.com).

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## FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF DECEMBER 20, 2023

DEPARTURES				ARRIVALS			
SAIPAN-GUAM (GUM)				GUAM (GUM)-SAIPAN			
UA076	9:50AM	10:35AM	Daily	UA174	8:00AM	8:45AM	Daily
SAIPAN- NARITA (NRT)				NARITA (NRT)-SAIPAN			
UA824	7:05AM	9:45AM	1, 3, 5	UA825	9:25PM	2:00AM+1	2, 4, 7
GUAM-MANILA (MNL)				MANILA (MNL)-GUAM			
PR 111	5:55AM	7:55AM	Daily	UA189	00:40AM	6:30AM	3, 6
UA193	7:50PM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Palau	PR110	10:05PM	3:55AM+1	Daily
UA183	7:55PM	9:50PM	Daily	UA192	10:40PM	6:30AM+1	2, 5 via Palau
				UA184	10:55PM	4:45AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7
SAIPAN-MANILA (MNL)				MANILA (MNL)-SAIPAN			
7C3403/2305	4:40AM	10:20PM	Daily	UA189/174	00:40AM	8:45AM+1	3, 6 via Guam
UA076/183	9:50AM	9:50PM	Daily via Guam	UA192/174	10:40PM	8:45AM+1	2, 5 via Palau, Guam
UA076/193	9:50AM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Guam, Palau	UA184/174	10:55PM	8:45AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7 via Guam
				7C2306/3406	11:15PM	3:30PM+1	Daily
SAIPAN-INCHEON (ICN)				INCHEON (ICN)-SAIPAN			
TW308	2:15AM	6:10AM	Daily	7C3406	10:10AM	3:30PM	Daily
7C3403	4:40AM	8:35AM	Daily	TW307	7:45PM	1:15AM+1	Daily
7C3405	4:35PM	8:25PM	Daily	7C3404	10:15PM	3:35AM+1	Daily
OZ626	3:10AM	6:55AM	4, 7	OZ625	8:20PM	1:40AM+1	3, 6

LEGEND: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); UA United Airlines; PR, Philippine Airlines; TW, T'Way Air; OZ, Asiana Airlines; 7C, Jeju Air; BX, Air Busan • ETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. *(The Saipan Tribune is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)*

## STAR MARIANAS AIR, INC.

### FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF OCTOBER 30, 2023

SAIPAN TO ROTA					
FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1301	SAIPAN	ROTA	08:30	09:00	Oct 21-31, 2023
1302	SAIPAN	ROTA	10:30	11:00	Daily
1303	SAIPAN	ROTA	15:30	16:00	Daily
ROTA TO SAIPAN					
FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3101	ROTA	SAIPAN	9:30	10:00	Oct 21-31, 2023
3102	ROTA	SAIPAN	11:30	12:00	Saturday & Sunday
3103	ROTA	SAIPAN	13:30	14:00	Monday To Friday
3104	ROTA	SAIPAN	16:30	17:00	Daily
ROTA TO GUAM					
FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3401	ROTA	GUAM	11:30	12:00	Monday To Friday
GUAM TO ROTA					
FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
4301	GUAM	ROTA	12:30	13:00	Monday To Friday
SAIPAN TO TINIAN					
FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1201	SAIPAN	TINIAN	7:30	7:45	Daily
1202	SAIPAN	TINIAN	8:00	8:15	Daily
1203	SAIPAN	TINIAN	9:00	9:15	Daily
1204	SAIPAN	TINIAN	10:00	10:15	Daily
1206	SAIPAN	TINIAN	15:00	15:15	Daily
1207	SAIPAN	TINIAN	16:00	16:15	Daily
1208	SAIPAN	TINIAN	17:00	17:15	Daily
TINIAN TO SAIPAN					
FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
2101	TINIAN	SAIPAN	8:00	8:15	Daily
2102	TINIAN	SAIPAN	8:30	8:45	Daily
2103	TINIAN	SAIPAN	9:30	9:45	Daily
2104	TINIAN	SAIPAN	10:30	10:45	Daily
2106	TINIAN	SAIPAN	15:30	15:45	Daily
2107	TINIAN	SAIPAN	16:30	16:45	Daily
2108	TINIAN	SAIPAN	17:30	17:45	Daily



# Flores: AG sans subpoena powers is embarrassing

## \$3K bail imposed on man accused of assault

By **KIMBERLY B. ESMORES**  
kimberly\_esmores@saipantribune.com  
REPORTER

The Superior Court has imposed a \$3,000 cash bail on a man accused of assaulting a woman during an argument.

Superior Court Associate Judge Joseph Camacho imposed Wednesday a \$3,000 cash bail on Moses Kaipat Buekis, 38, who is charged with assault and battery, domestic violence, and disturbing the peace.

The Superior Court released Buekis on his own recognizance and ordered him to return to court on Jan. 8, 2024, for his arraignment.

According to court documents, the Department of Public Safety received a call on Dec. 21 at around 6:56pm about a disturbance at the Benavente Apartments in As Lito.

At the scene, police spoke with the anonymous caller who reported that a woman and man were heard shouting in one of the apartments. However, after police couldn't locate the apartment, they left. Later that evening, police met with the owner of the apartments, who brought police to the alleged victim.

The alleged victim told police that she got into an argument with Buekis that turned physical.

Police later met with Buekis who allegedly admitted to punching the victim.

At around 7:39pm, police arrested Buekis and booked him at the Department of Corrections.

In a follow up interview with the victim, she told police that she and Buekis had been drinking alcohol throughout the day when Buekis got mad about the food she had given him. Around 5pm that same day, the victim said she and Buekis got into another argument, which allegedly led to Buekis punching the victim twice in the face.

During the argument, the victim said she yelled out for help when Buekis allegedly wrapped his hands around her neck for about five seconds. The victim later added that Buekis also kicked her in her right rib.

By **FERDIE DE LA TORRE**  
ferdie\_delatorre@saipantribune.com  
REPORTER

Having an elected attorney general that has no power to issue a subpoena is a disgrace and embarrassing, according to Rep. Marissa Renee Flores (Ind-Saipan) said Wednesday.

To remedy this situation, Flores urged the public to support her stand and demand that her legislation, House Bill 23-22, which seeks to grant the attorney general this power, be taken out of the Senate committee and put on the floor for voting.

"Because we will see now who is for corruption and who isn't. Whether it dies, that's up to them [senators]. But at least the people will know if it's on the floor and it's voted on," she

## » Lawmaker urges public to call senators and demand to take out bill from committee and vote on it

said during yesterday's House of Representatives session.

House Bill 23-22 seeks to create an investigative division within the Office of the Attorney General, codify investigative subpoena power, and improve the investigation of cases involving public corruption.

Flores introduced the bill last March 9; it was then referred to the House Judiciary and Governmental Operations Committee, which later recommended the legislation's passage.

Last March 10, the House

passed the bill. The bill is now with the Senate Judiciary, Government and Law Committee chaired by Sen. Celina R. Babauta (D-Saipan).

Flores said yesterday that there's a section in the bill that talks about investigative subpoena power. She said the bill allows the attorney general to act quickly in responding to complaints regarding criminal matters, but especially those involving misconduct in public office and public officials.

Flores said she wants to



Flores



## COMMONWEALTH UTILITIES CORPORATION OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



### INVITATION FOR BIDS CUC-IFB-24-002

#### AGINGAN WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT IMPROVEMENTS

The Office of the Executive Director, Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) is soliciting competitive sealed bids from qualified firms for the Construction of Agingan Wastewater Treatment Plant Improvements in Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

The work consists of furnishing all labor, supervision, equipment, materials and supplies for the construction of various improvements within the Agingan Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) for the project referred to as the AGINGAN WWTP IMPROVEMENTS, Saipan, CNMI under Project No. S18-065 and Project No. S20-079.

The work generally includes, but is not limited to:

##### Project No. S18-065

Installation of the owner-furnished primary screen within 120 calendar days after Notice to Proceed is issued. Additionally, replacement of the clarifier drive; rehabilitation of the headworks includes replacement of the weir gates to stop gate, a 1/2-ton hand crank hoist/crane; clarifier bypass; electrical service rehabilitation, replacement of the existing Motor Control Center (MCC), installation of a generator automatic transfer switch (ATS) and digester decanter improvements. The work shall be done in accordance with Project No. S18-065 Plans and Specifications.

##### Project No. S20-079

Provision of temporary facilities including bypass pumping; furnishing and installing new Vortex Grit Removal Equipment and headworks slide gates, which will require demolition of certain elements within and improvements to the existing headworks channel and deck area; replacement of the existing surface aerator equipment in the North/South Aeration Tanks and Aerobic Digester Tank with a new surface aerator equipment which will require modifications to the existing concrete tank structures; replacement of existing pipe supports for the Aeration Basin influent piping; associated electrical, instrumentation, and control improvements; demobilization; and all other work described in Project No. S20-079 Plans and Specifications.

The work shall be done without disruption to the daily operation of the wastewater system.

CUC requires the Project to be completed within 820 calendar days from the date of the award of contract.

**The project is funded by a grant from the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). The award of this project is contingent upon receipt of approval for project award from USEPA.**

Prospective Bidders for this IFB must pre-register with the CUC Procurement & Supply Division. The Bid Package may be obtained from the CUC Procurement and Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, Saipan, between 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on government observed holidays, upon completion of registration and presentation of a receipt evidencing a non-refundable payment to the CUC Treasury Section, by cash, check or credit card in the amount of \$200.00 (non-refundable) for one IFB package set.

A Pre-Bid Conference followed by a Site Visit is scheduled on **December 27, 2023 at 10:00 AM (ChST)** at the CUC Main Conference Room, 3rd Floor, Room No.17, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building.

**One (1) original and Five (5) hard copies** must be submitted in a sealed envelope marked "CUC-IFB-24-002, Agingan Wastewater Treatment Plant Improvements", to the CUC Procurement & Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, P.O. Box 501220, Saipan, MP 96950, **no later than 10:00 AM (ChST) on January 18, 2024**, at which time they will be publicly opened and read aloud. Late submissions and conditional bids will not be considered. Bid shall be submitted on the provided Bid Forms. Bidders are required to complete all Bid Forms. Bidders may supplement the form as appropriate. Bids will be required to be submitted under a condition of irrevocability for a period of 60 days after submission. **Late submissions and conditional bids will not be considered.**

All bidders are advised that CUC assumes no responsibility in any act of omission on the part of the bidders due to lack of information or understanding of the bid requirements in the course of Contractor's preparation of a bid under the contract.

**A Bid Guarantee** of not less than fifteen (15%) percent of the total bid price must accompany the bids. The bid guarantee may be in cash, certified check, cashier's check, or bid bond **executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety**. A Payment Bond of one hundred (100%) percent and a Performance Bond of one hundred (100%) percent of the total bid price will be required upon the execution of the contract by the successful bidder. The Payment and Performance bond **must be executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety**. Surety Company must be authorized to do business in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

All insurers' questions, concerns and qualification shall be handled by the Department of Commerce Office of the Insurance Commissioner (OIC). The OIC is tasked with regulating and monitoring compliance to the CNMI's Insurance Code (Title 4, Division 7). **Bidders are required to submit a clearance from the OIC certifying their insurer of choice is in compliance with the CNMI's Insurance Code.**

All bidders are required to comply with all CNMI and applicable Federal Laws. This bid and the ensuing contract shall be executed pursuant to the CUC Procurement Regulations.

All questions or request for clarification regarding this project must be submitted in writing no later than **10:00 (ChST) on December 28, 2023** to Mr. Manny B. Sablan, CUC Purchasing Administrator, via email at [manny.sablan@cucgov.org](mailto:manny.sablan@cucgov.org) with a copy to Mr. Larry Manacop, Acting Chief Engineer – via email at [larry.manacop@cucgov.org](mailto:larry.manacop@cucgov.org), and Marcela Tenorio, Procurement & Supply, Senior Administrative Technician – via email at [marcela.tenorio@cucgov.org](mailto:marcela.tenorio@cucgov.org).

CUC reserves the right to reject any or all bids and waive any imperfection in the bid proposal in the best interest of the government. All bids shall become the property of CUC.

BETTINA G. TERLAJE  
Acting Executive Director

MANNY B. SABLAN  
Purchasing Administrator

see who among the nine senators are going to approve this bill because this legislation, according to her, is crucial to the fight against corruption.

"We talk about fighting corruption. But yeah, we don't want to address the elephant in the room. The AG has no subpoena power," she said.

Flores said the bill was supported by several of her colleagues in the House and there was a committee report.

"We didn't pass this on

first and final [reading]. The committee report was handed, it was passed," said she, adding that the bill has been sitting in the Senate committee since March.

Flores said an attorney general without subpoena powers is unheard of.

"I don't know about you guys, but I think that is a disgrace. And I think that is embarrassing. Because we sit here talking about public corruption and all of this and yet, for the longest time, we never knew that the Office of Attorney General never had subpoena powers," she said.

## COMMONWEALTH PORTS AUTHORITY

MAIN OFFICE: SAIPAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, 2ND FLOOR ARRIVAL BLDG.  
PO BOX 501055 • SAIPAN • MP • 96950  
PHONE: (1-670) 237-6500/1 • FAX: (1-670) 234-5962  
WEBSITE: WWW.CNMIPORTS.COM



### REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATION STATEMENTS FOR ARCHITECTURAL/ENGINEERING DESIGN AND PLANNING SERVICES

#### CHARLIE DOCK EXTENSION PROJECT PORT OF SAIPAN PROJECT NO. CPA-SS-001-24

The Commonwealth Ports Authority (CPA) is a public corporation and autonomous agency of the Government of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). In accordance with its Procurement Rules and Regulations, CPA is soliciting statements of professional qualifications from interested Consultants for Architectural and Engineering (A/E) Design and Planning Services for the Charlie Dock Extension Project at the Port of Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Project No. CPA-SS-001-24.

The project is being funded by the U.S. Maritime Administration and is in accordance and compliance with CPA's Procurement Rules and Regulations, Section 40-50-202, Architect-Engineer Design and Construction Management Services.

The Request for Qualification (RFQ) Package is available at CPA's Administration Office, 2nd floor of the arrival terminal at the Francisco C. Ada/Saipan International Airport. No fee is required for obtaining the RFQ package. Electronic copies may be made available upon written request to Ms. Wendi Prater at [wprater@cnmiports.com](mailto:wprater@cnmiports.com) or Ms. Sheri Llagas at [receptionist@cnmiports.com](mailto:receptionist@cnmiports.com).

Questions regarding this request for qualification statements must be submitted to Ms. Prater, CPA's Executive Assistant/Project Manager, via email to [wprater@cnmiports.com](mailto:wprater@cnmiports.com) or hand delivered to the CPA Administration Office by no later than 5:00 p.m. CHST, Friday, January 12, 2024.

The statements of professional qualification will be evaluated based on the criteria available in the RFQ package.

Interested Consultants are requested to submit one (1) original, four (4) copies and one (1) electronic version in .pdf of their statements of professional qualifications no later than **5:00 p.m. CHST, FRIDAY, JANUARY 26, 2024**. Statements of qualification must be presented by a combination of both brochures and the use of current U.S. Government Standard Form 330.

The CPA reserves the right to reject any or all statements of professional qualification for any reason, if in its sole opinion to do so would be in its best interest.

/s/ LEO B. TUDELA  
Executive Director

Date: December 20, 2023

## COMMONWEALTH PORTS AUTHORITY

MAIN OFFICE: SAIPAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, 2ND FLOOR ARRIVAL BLDG.  
PO BOX 501055 • SAIPAN • MP • 96950  
PHONE: (1-670) 237-6500/1 • FAX: (1-670) 234-5962  
E-MAIL ADDRESS: CPA.ADMIN@PTICOM.COM • WEBSITE: HTTPS://WWW.CNMIPORTS.COM



### Francisco C. Ada/Saipan International Airport "Car Rental Concession"

#### Request for Proposals for: CPA-RFP-001-24 CPA Concession No. CRS-2023-01

The Commonwealth Ports Authority ("CPA" or "Authority") is soliciting proposals for the award of one (1) concession granting the privilege to provide motor vehicle rental services to the traveling public (including the provision of insurance related to motor vehicles rented in the operation of such motor vehicle rental services) at the Francisco C. Ada/Saipan International Airport ("Car Rental Concession"). The successful proposer will be expected to provide motor vehicle rental services in accordance with its concession and concession agreement at the Francisco C. Ada/Saipan International Airport for a period of two years with an option upon entering into a concession agreement with the Authority.

The date of issuance of CPA-Concession No. CRS-2023-01 is **December 6, 2023**, and it can be obtained at the issuing office: CPA Administration Office, Saipan International Airport, P.O. Box 501055, Saipan, MP 96950, Second floor of Arrival terminal at the Saipan International Airport.

Proposals must be addressed to Commonwealth Ports Authority, Attn: Car Rental Concessions Evaluation Committee, CPA Administration Office, Saipan International Airport, P.O. Box 501055, Saipan, MP 96950; and submitted to and received by the CPA Administration Office (second floor of arrival terminal at the Saipan International Airport) **by or before 4:00 p.m. on January 9, 2024**, at which time the proposal period shall expire. Proposals must be accompanied with a non-refundable administrative fee of \$100.00. Payment shall be made in cash, credit card, or cashier's check payable to the Commonwealth Ports Authority to defray the costs associated with handling and considering the proposal. Proposals are not required to include a prepaid minimum concession fee.

The Commonwealth Ports Authority reserves the right to cancel this RFP and to reject any and all proposals in accordance with its Concession Regulations (NMIAC Chapter 40-70).

/s/  
LEO B. TUDELA  
Executive Director



# Taga Riders Club donates toys, books to CHCC Pediatrics

The Commonwealth Healthcare Corp.'s Pediatrics Unit was the recipient of a generous contribution from the Taga Riders Motorcycle Club—a thoughtful donation compris-

ing books and toys—last Dec. 27, 2023.

According to a CHCC news release, the Taga Riders have consistently demonstrated a heartfelt commit-

ment in spreading joy and making a meaningful difference during the holiday season through their annual Christmas donations.

“Their dedication to sup-





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CHCC  
Staff of the Commonwealth Healthcare Corp.'s Pediatrics Unit hold up the donation of the Taga Riders Motorcycle Club.

porting children in need underscores the true spirit of the season, as they bring smiles and warmth to the young ones in our care. The kindness and generosity of Taga Riders not only brighten the festive season for these pediatric recipients but also exemplifies the

positive impact that a community can have when coming together to support those who need it most," the CHCC news release stated.

This year marks the 29th year that the Taga Riders Motorcycle Club has given back to the CNMI community in

acts of kindness like toys and books donations to the CHC Pediatrics unit and many others. The club was established in 1994.

"Thank you, Taga Riders Motorcycle Club, for spreading the joy of Christmas," the statement added. **(PR)**

## BPD submits initial BEAD proposals to NTIA

In a significant step forward in bridging the digital divide, the Broadband Policy & Development Office, established through the CNMI Office of the Governor, has officially submitted both of the Broadband, Equity, Accessibility, and Development program's Initial Proposal



19, 2023, showcasing the BPD's commitment to timely and comprehensive broadband policy development within the CNMI.

Both initial proposals underwent diligent revisions based on invaluable pre-review comments from the NTIA and public input during the 30-day comment period. The comments, presented by local and global stakeholders, provided valuable insights, helping shape the proposals to meet the NTIA's rigorous standards. Both proposals are currently undergoing a curing process, managed by the NTIA, that involves addressing any missing documents, resolving application deficiencies, and providing final guidance. This process ensures that both Initial Proposals continuously meet the NTIA's standards set forth for the BEAD program. The BPD anticipates NTIA's approval post-curing, allowing the team to progress further into the BEAD program process.

Volume 1 and Initial Proposal Volume 2 to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration.


On Dec. 5, 2023, Initial Proposal Volume 1 was officially submitted, well ahead of NTIA's Dec. 27, 2023 deadline. Following suit, Initial Proposal Volume 2 was officially submitted on Dec.

## CUC offices, customers service centers closed Jan. 1


In observance of the New Year, Commonwealth Utilities Corp. offices and customers service centers will be closed on Monday, Jan. 1, 2024.

For more information, contact CUC's hotline at (670) 236-4333 or visit its website and Facebook page for the latest updates.

For emergencies, please contact Customer Service at (670) 664-4282. **(CUC)**



**CNMI DIVISION OF PROCUREMENT SERVICES**  
**CNMI GOVERNMENT**



**INVITATION TO BID**  
**ITB NO.: ITB24-BECQ/DLNR-42400026-CIF ROTA**

**SUBMISSION DATE: JANUARY 30, 2024 TIME: 09:30 A.M.**

**“PURCHASE OF ONE (1)**  
**AGRICULTURAL TRACTOR FOR**  
**DLNR, ROTA”**

COPIES OF THE SPECIFICATIONS MAY BE OBTAINED ON THE MUNIS VENDOR SELF SERVICE PORTAL (<https://selfservice.dof.gov.mp/vss/>) OR AT THE OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF PROCUREMENT SERVICES, LOCATED AT BLDG NO. 12552, ANATAHAN DRIVE, CAPTIOLO HILL, SAIPAN, DURING REGULAR WORKING HOURS.

**QUESTIONS** REGARDING THIS ITB CAN BE MADE TO THE BUREAU OF ENVIRONMENTAL & COASTAL QUALITY BY JANUARY 19, 2024, TO MR. RICHARD V. SALAS VIA EMAIL AT [rsalas@dcrm.gov.mp](mailto:rsalas@dcrm.gov.mp)

**THE PROVISIONS OF THE CNMI PROCUREMENT REGULATIONS, NMIAC SECTION 70-30.3-725 AND 70-30.3-730 PROHIBITING GRATUITIES, KICKBACKS AND CONTINGENT FEES SHALL APPLY.**

THE CNMI GOVERNMENT RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REJECT ANY OR ALL BIDS, OR PORTIONS THEREOF, AND WAIVE IMMATERIAL DEFECTS IF TO DO SO WOULD BE IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE CNMI GOVERNMENT.


**/S/ RICHARD V. SALAS**  
**ACTING ADMINISTRATOR, BECQ**

**/S/ BRIEN S. NICHOLAS JR.**  
**ACTING DIRECTOR, PS**



**NORTHERN MARIANAS HOUSING CORPORATION**

P.O. BOX 500514, Saipan, MP 96950-0514  
Email: [nmhc@nmhc.gov.mp](mailto:nmhc@nmhc.gov.mp) Website: <http://www.cnmi-cdbgr.com>



**INVITATION FOR BID (IFB)**  
**NMHC IFB 2024-005**

(This ad is paid by NMHC by HUD funds)

**BID SUBMISSION DATE & TIME:** February 08, 2024, 2:00 p.m.

**Rehabilitation of the Sinapalo Youth Center**

Project package will be available on **December 29, 2023**, at the NMHC Central Office in Garapan, Saipan, during regular working hours (7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) Monday thru Friday except CNMI holidays. A non-refundable payment of **One Hundred Dollars (\$100.00)** is required for each set of the project package. Payment must be made payable to NMHC and a receipt of payment must be presented when obtaining the project package at the reception counter.

The provisions of the NMHC Procurement regulations, NMIAC 100-60-725 AND 100-60-730 Prohibiting Gratuities, Kickbacks and Contingent Fees shall apply.

A Mandatory Pre-Bid conference will be at the NMHC Field Office in Rota located in Sinapalo, Rota on **January 19, 2024, 2:00 p.m.** Failure to attend the Mandatory Pre-bid conference will be considered a non-responsive bidder. Immediately after the Mandatory Pre-Bid conference, bidders are required to join the NMHC Personnel to visit and examine the project site. Failure to attend the project site visit will be considered a non-responsive bidder. Inquiries regarding this solicitation must be addressed in writing to Mr. Jacob Muna, Office Manager/Procurement Officer via email at [officemanager@nmhc.gov.net](mailto:officemanager@nmhc.gov.net) or mail at P.O. Box 500514, Saipan, MP 96950 or via fax at (670)234-9021, no later than 4:00 p.m. January 30, 2023.

For more information, contact Mr. Jacob Muna, Office Manager/Procurement Officer, at (670)234-6866/9447 or email at [officemanager@nmhc.gov.net](mailto:officemanager@nmhc.gov.net) during regular business hours, 7:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, except CNMI holidays.

**/S/ JESSE S. PALACIOS**  
Corporate Director

**/S/ MERCED "MARCIE" M. TOMOKANE**  
Chairwoman  
NMHC Board of Directors



# Off the Wall

**1-2-3 AND COUNTING:**

## Las Vegas weddings could hit high on New Year's Eve



AP

Decorations adorn The Wedding Chapel at Vegas Weddings on Tuesday, Dec. 19, 2023, in Las Vegas.

**LAS VEGAS (AP)**—For better or for worse, a wave of couples saying “I do” in Las Vegas on New Year's Eve could set a record for the city's busiest wedding day ever.

That's because 12/31/23 is known in the massive Las Vegas wedding industry as a “specialty date,” thanks to the repeating 1-2-3 1-2-3 pattern, the Las Vegas Review-Journal reported.

The icing on the cake? This specialty date falls on a holiday famous for blow-out celebrations.

“It's a double whammy,” said Melody Willis-Williams, president of Vegas Weddings,

which operates multiple venues. “Anytime you get these specialty dates, they're always hugely popular. But tie that in with New Year's Eve and it's a showstopper.”

The number to beat on New Year's Eve is 4,492—the single-day record for marriages in Las Vegas set on July 7, 2007. The second-most popular specialty wedding date on record with the county's marriage bureau is Nov. 11, 2011, when 3,125 couples tied the knot.

Typically, New Year's Eve has drawn somewhere between 450 to 550 couples to wed in Las Vegas since 2018, the Review-Journal reported.

But not this year for Vegas Weddings. The company is fully booked on midnight at its multiple venues, including its brown-brick chapel in downtown Las Vegas with a white steeple and red awning.

Willis-Williams said her company alone expects to wed more than 120 couples on New Year's Eve. Five of those couples will tie the knot just as the clock is counting down to midnight.

Clark County Clerk Lynn Marie Goya said couples married on a specialty date in Las Vegas have described them as “magic dates” that are easy to remember.

## ‘You are the father!’ Maury Povich declares to Denver Zoo orangutan

Initially unsure of which orangutan was the father of a new baby primate, the Denver Zoo decided to have a little fun with the results and turned to the paternity announcement guru himself: former daytime talk show host Maury Povich.

Just as he would do on his long-running show, Povich pulled the purported DNA results for 4-month-old Siska out of an envelope and declared: “Berani. You are the father!”

The zoo posted the video on social media this week.

Siska, a female who was born on Aug. 27, is the first baby for Eirina, a 15-year-old Sumatran orangutan, who came to the Denver Zoo from Germany's Dortmund Zoo in 2016.

Sumatran orangutans are listed as critically endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, with a rapidly declining wild population due to habitat loss, illegal

hunting and the black-market pet trade, the zoo said in announcing Siska's birth.

Siska's father remained a mystery because the zoo's animal care team had to wait a few months before Eirina was comfortable allowing them to get close enough to get a hair sample from Siska to compare her DNA against 30-year-old Berani and 16-year-old Jaya.

“When I heard we received the results, the first thing that popped into my mind was, ‘Berani, you ARE the father!’” Jake Kubić, the zoo's director of communications, said in an email Thursday.

## Woman with double uterus gives birth to 2

**DORA, Ala. (AP)**—An Alabama woman with two uteri and two cervixes has given birth to two babies after carrying one of them in each uterus.

Kelsey Hatcher of Dora, about 28 miles (45.06 kilometers) northwest of Birmingham, gave birth to two girls on Wednesday and Thursday after a combined 20 hours of labor.

Hatcher was diagnosed with

a double uterus, also called uterus didelphys, when she was 17. The rare congenital condition occurs in 0.3% of women, according to a report published by the University of Alabama at Birmingham. There is an “estimated one-in-a-million chance” of carrying a baby in both uteri, also known as a dicavitary pregnancy, the report says.

The older child, Roxi, was

born on Tuesday, and Rebel arrived on Wednesday. Hatcher told WVTM-TV that both she and the newborns are healthy. Her husband, Caleb, was with her in the hospital, she said.

“That was our first moment of just us four together,” Hatcher said. “And really getting to breathe that in and be in the moment and look at the girls together.”

# Science & Technology

## Biggest solar flare in years disrupts Earth radio signals

**CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP)**—A NASA telescope has captured the biggest solar flare in years, which temporarily knocked out radio communication on Earth.

The sun spit out the huge flare along with a massive radio burst on Thursday, causing two hours of radio interference in parts of the U.S. and other sunlit parts of the world. Scientists at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said it was the biggest flare since 2017, and the radio burst was extensive, affecting even the higher frequencies.

The combination resulted in one of the largest solar radio events ever recorded, Shawn Dahl of NOAA's Space Weather Prediction Center said Friday.

Multiple pilots reported communication disruptions, with the impact felt across the country, according to the space weather forecasting center. Scientists are now monitoring this sunspot region and analyzing for a possible outburst of plasma from the sun, also known as a coronal mass ejection, that might be directed at Earth. This could result in a

geomagnetic storm, Dahl said, which in turn could disrupt high-frequency radio signals at the higher latitudes and trigger northern lights, or auroras, in the coming days.

The eruption occurred in the far northwest section of the sun. NASA's Solar Dynamics Observatory caught the action in extreme ultraviolet light, recording the powerful surge of energy as a huge, bright flash. Launched in 2010, the spacecraft is in an extremely high orbit around Earth, where it constantly monitors the sun.

## Int'l astronaut will be invited on future NASA moon landing

**CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP)**—An international astronaut will join U.S. astronauts on the moon by decade's end under an agreement announced Wednesday by NASA and the White House.

The news came as Vice President Kamala Harris convened a meeting in Washington of the National Space Council, the third such gathering under the

Biden administration.

There was no mention of who the international moonwalker might be or even what country would be represented. A NASA spokeswoman later said that crews would be assigned closer to the lunar-landing missions, and that no commitments had yet been made to another country.

NASA has included international astronauts on

trips to space for decades. Canadian Jeremy Hansen will fly around the moon a year or so from now with three U.S. astronauts.

Another crew would actually land; it would be the first lunar touchdown by astronauts in more than a half-century. That's not likely to occur before 2027, according to the U.S. Government Accountability Office.

### Science Matters

## Sharks must swim to breathe?

Observations of Indian Ocean sharks resting quietly under reef ledges have led marine biologists to reconsider an old belief — that sharks must keep moving to survive.

### Active mode and quiet mode

Sharks have two ways of moving oxygen-rich sea water through their mouths and over their gills



A shark slightly opens its mouth as it swims; gill slits on its side open as water flows through

### ‘Ram ventilators’

Some sharks swim constantly — or find an advantageous location in a sea current — to keep oxygenated water flowing over their gills

Christopher Leon photo



### ‘Buccal pumpers’

Others sometimes remain stationary and actively push water over their gills from their buccal (mouth) cavity

A resting grey reef shark — usually a ram ventilator — slowly opens and closes its mouth, pumping water

### Do sharks sleep?

Sharks observed in the Seychelles islands remained calm and apparently unaware of their observers — a key sign that they were asleep and not just resting

No solid evidence that constant ram ventilators sleep. They may not sleep at all, or they sleep using half their brain (like sperm whales and bottlenose dolphins)

Source: Craig Foster of SeaChange Project; Journal of Fish Biology  
Graphic: Helen Lee McComas, Tribune News Service

© 2023 TNS



# Life & Style

## Taylor Swift's new romance is among most joyous moments of 2023

**KANSAS CITY, Mo.** (AP)—A romance that united sports and music fans, a celestial wonder that drew millions of eyes skyward and a spiritual homecoming for some Native American tribes were just some of the moments that inspired us and brought joy in 2023.

In a year that saw multiple wars, deadly mass shootings, earthquakes, wildfires, sexual harassment stories and other tragedies, these events were among those that broke through the tumult of 2023 and made people feel hopeful.

As Taylor Swift would say, "Hold on to the memories." Here are a few of them:

### A friendship bracelet with a phone number

That's how Kansas City Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce planned to woo superstar Taylor Swift when he went to her Eras Tour concert stop in the Missouri capital. It didn't work—at first.

But the romantic gesture, and public admission of defeat on his "New Heights" podcast, caught the Grammy Award-winner's attention. After the power pair took their relationship public—she went to a Chiefs game and sat in a box with Kelce's mom, to the delight of fans—they began taking the world by storm.

Sportscasters calculated Swift's effect on Kelce's game stats and TV viewership, national magazines offered up comprehensive dating timelines, and Swift fans scoured Kelce's old social media posts to make sure he was fit for their queen.

On tour in Buenos Aires, the then-33-year-old singer changed a lyric from "Karma is the guy on the screen"

to "Karma is the guy on the Chiefs." And fans went crazy when she jumped into Kelce's arms for an iconic post-concert kiss.

"I think we're all excited about it. Until they start making good romcoms again, this is what we have," said Michal Owens, a 37-year-old longtime fan from the Indianapolis suburb of Zionsville.

While pint-sized pairs of trick-or-treaters donned glitzy dresses and Chiefs jerseys this Halloween, Owens transformed her outdoor display into a tribute. The mother of three dressed one 12-foot-tall (3.66-meters-tall) skeleton in a Chiefs jersey, another in a sparkly dress and then stacked three smaller skeletons atop one another to create what she called a "tower of Swifties."

"We've got so many things in the world to be sad about," she said. "Why not find something to root for and give us some joy?"

### An awe-inspiring eclipse

From Oregon's coast to the beaches of Corpus Christi, Texas, millions of people in October donned special glasses and gazed upward to take in the dazzling "ring of fire" eclipse of the sun.

"It's kind of spiritual, but in a way that is almost tangible," University of Texas at San Antonio astrophysics professor Angela Speck said as she recalled the type of eclipse that ancient Mayan astronomers called a "broken sun."

Crowds in the path of the eclipse erupted in cheers when the moon blocked out all but a brilliant circle of the sun's outer edge. Participants at an international balloon fiesta in



ANDREW ROSE GREGORY

This family photo shows Casey McIntyre.

Albuquerque, New Mexico, whooped from the launch pad. Broadcasters for NASA said they felt a chill as the moon cast a shadow over the earth—and one broadcaster was so overcome with emotion that she began crying.

The phenomenon was a prelude to the total solar eclipse that will sweep across Mexico, the eastern half of the U.S. and Canada, in April 2024. But the next "ring of fire" eclipse won't be visible in the U.S. until 2039 and then only in parts of Alaska.

### In death, a selfless act

Surprise letters are showing up in mailboxes, informing recipients that their medical debt is wiped away.

They have Casey McIntyre to thank. The 38-year-old New York City book publisher nearly died of cancer in May. But in what her husband, Andrew Rose Gregory, called a "bonus summer," the young mother made plans to help people after she was gone. Her goal: To erase medical debt.

In a message posted after her death in November, she asked for donations, writing, "I loved each and every one of

you with my whole heart and I promise you, I knew how deeply I was loved."

By December, the campaign had raised more than \$1 million, enough to erase around \$100 million in debt. That's because the nonprofit RIP Medical Debt says every dollar donated buys about \$100 in debt.

"Her positive spirit is just resonating with a lot of people," said Allison Sesso, the nonprofit's president and CEO.

The effort was inspired by the people McIntyre met during treatment. They weren't just worried about their health but how to pay for their care. She had good insurance—and "couldn't even fathom having to deal with that on top of the cancer," Sesso said.

The fundraiser, which quickly shattered its initial goal of \$20,000, gave her family a sliver of "something positive" to focus on amid their grief. It was particularly hard for the family because when McIntyre died, her daughter was just a toddler, not yet 2.

"This sounds crazy but she didn't seem angry at all," said Sesso. "She was like, 'This happened. I've accepted that this has happened, and I'm go-

ing to do this positive thing.'"

### A spiritual homecoming

When the Grand Canyon became a national park over a century ago, many Native Americans who called it home were displaced.

In 2023, meaningful steps were taken to address the federal government's actions. In May, a ceremony marked the renaming of a popular campground in the inner canyon from Indian Garden to Havasupai Gardens, or "Ha'a Gyoh," in the Havasupai language.

It marked a pivotal moment in the tribe's relationship with the U.S. government nearly a century after the last tribal member was forcibly removed from the park. The Havasupai Tribe was landless for a time until the federal government set aside a plot in the depths of the Grand Canyon for members.

Then in August, President Joe Biden signed a national monument designation—over the opposition of Republican lawmakers and the uranium mining industry—to help preserve about 1,562 square miles (4,046 square kilometers) to the north and south of Grand Canyon National Park.

It was another big step for the Havasupai, and for the 10 other tribes that consider the Grand Canyon their ancestral homeland.

The new national monument is called Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni. "Baaj Nwaavjo" meaning "where tribes roam," for the Havasupai people, while "I'tah Kukveni" translates to "our footprints," for the Hopi Tribe.

The move restricts new mining claims and brings tribal voices to the table to manage the environment, said Jack

Pongyesva, of the Grand Canyon Trust, an advocacy group that represents tribal and environmental issues in the region.

He said it also could open the door for more cultural tourism, where visitors could learn not just about the landscape but about the tribes—from the tribes themselves.

Pongyesva, a member of the Hopi Tribe, said the dedication is "The beginning of hopefully this healing and looking back and seeing what was wrong and moving forward together."

### A resilient return

Firs are mainstays of Christmas tree lots. But on the Isle Royale National Park near Michigan's border with Canada, balsam firs were being devoured.

Gray wolves on the remote island cluster in Lake Superior were already dying out from inbreeding, causing the moose population to become a "run-away freight train" and strip trees that were wolves' primary food during long, snow-bound winters, said Michigan Tech biologist Rolf Peterson.

An ambitious plan was hatched to airlift wolves from the mainland to the park—and it's starting to make a big difference. A report this year shows the resurging wolf population is thriving and the moose total is shrinking, giving the trees a chance to recover.

There were critics of the plan, but Peterson said there weren't other viable options. Because of climate change, particularly global warming, there are fewer ice bridges, reducing wolves' ability to trek from the mainland and diversify the gene pool.

"That was a huge undertaking," Peterson said, and it turned out "spectacularly well."

## Unhappy wife ponders life with a new beau

**DEAR ABBY:** I have been married to my husband for 12 years. We have had our ups and downs. I was unfaithful at one point, and he left for eight months, but we worked through it all.

We are now coming out of another really rough patch involving a lot of arguing and talk of divorce. I'm having a hard time because around the time he left, I started falling out of love with him. I tried my best to be a good wife and do what I am supposed to, but this last bout of unpleasantness has left me feeling empty and no longer in love.

There is now someone in my life I have developed strong feelings for. I imagine a life with him and the thought of being with him excites me. My husband is a good person, but he's an alcohol and drug addict. He has done EVERYTHING he can and is willing to do things he can't to ensure I love him as much as he loves me, and that our marriage doesn't end. He has been sober now for seven years, but habits and tendencies still remain.

The problems in our marriage are not all his fault. I have some things I also need to work on, and yet, I still imagine a life with another man. What should I do?

CONFLICTED IN TEXAS

**DEAR CONFLICTED:** Please discuss the state of your

**marriage (and your feelings) with a licensed marriage and family therapist. It might make sense for you and your husband to have a trial separation, because changing partners might not be what you hope it will be. It would give you the chance to find out whether the "excitement" you feel for this other man is real or the illusion of a woman who is unhappy. You have already been through so much, so please do nothing on impulse now.**

■ ■ ■

**DEAR ABBY:** I am a retired widow. A new neighbor moved in next door. I have always been pleasant to her while she complains about everyone and everything, but it's getting old. She watches for me to walk my dog, then runs outside to tell me her latest woe or complain about something. She has now begun ringing my doorbell and inviting herself inside for the same reasons.

Abby, I live in a small community. We are all close neighbors. I don't know what to do about this woman. Can you suggest anything? I'm thinking about moving.

PRIVATE IN NORTH CAROLINA

**DEAR PRIVATE:** It appears your new neighbor is friendless, and for good reason. As I see it, there are a cou-

## DEAR ABBY

BY ABIGAIL VAN BUREN  
UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Contact Dear Abby at [www.DearAbby.com](http://www.DearAbby.com) or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.



**ple of things you can do to discourage her. The first would be, when you are trapped and she is complaining, to stop her and tell her you prefer to talk only about PLEASANT things. The second would be, when she rings your bell, to tell her you are busy and when you want company you will invite her over. Do NOT let her in.**

■ ■ ■

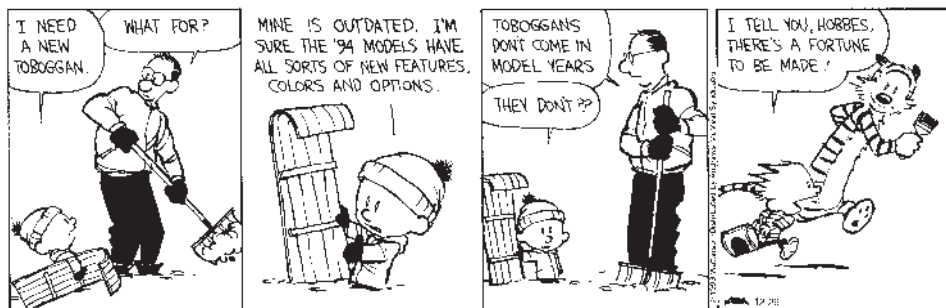
Good advice for everyone—teens to seniors—is in "The Anger in All of Us and How to Deal With It." To order, send your name and mailing address, plus check or money order for \$8 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby, Anger Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Shipping and handling are included in the price.)



# Pastimes

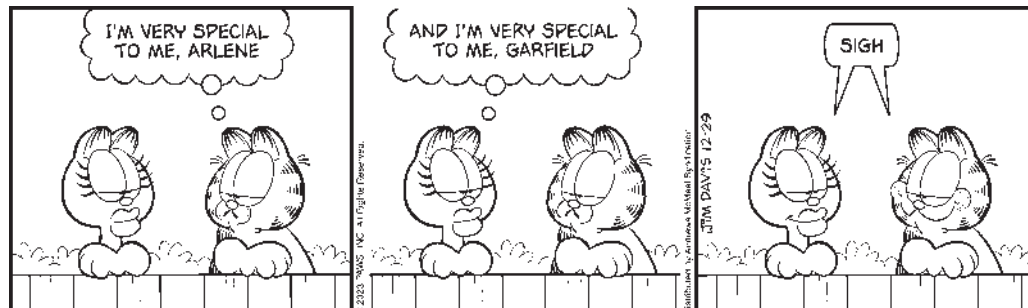
## Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson



## Garfield®

By Jim Davis



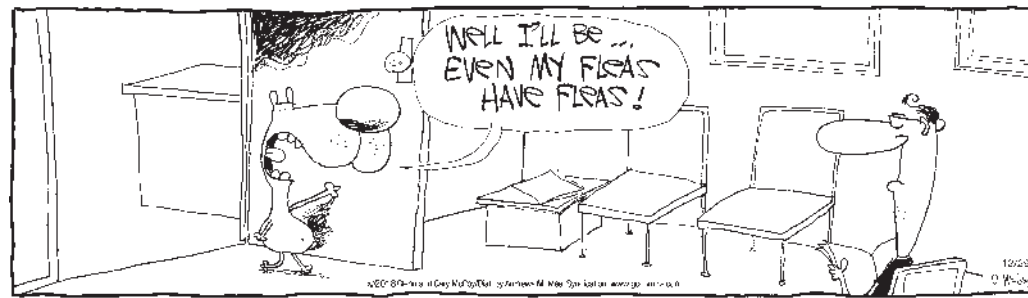
## Adam@home

By Bryan Basset



## The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy



## CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

**ACROSS**

1 German auto  
4 Roman 202  
8 Turner or Fey  
12 Bill's partner  
13 Expel  
14 Baltic feeder  
15 Great Barrier Reef locale  
17 Libretto  
18 Music genre for BTS  
19 Defeats  
20 River of Rome  
22 Counterfeit  
24 Big fusses  
25 Bar mixer  
29 Author Tolstoy  
30 Limerick feature  
31 Pep  
32 Church fundraiser  
34 Big rig  
35 Wee  
36 Edgy

**DOWN**

37 African language group  
40 Retained  
41 Six-sided state  
42 Radio ID  
46 Donated  
47 Biblical king  
48 Bygone bird  
49 Swizzle  
50 Doctrines  
51 Montreal summer

**16 Tarzan's clique**  
**19 Innocent one**  
**20 Body powder**  
**21 Notion**

**4 Shade**  
**5 Point group**  
**6 British verb ending**  
**7 "Give — rest!"**  
**8 Tribal emblems**  
**9 Mid-month date**  
**10 Adjoining**  
**11 Newspaper section**  
**33 Choice word**  
**34 Tries the coffee**  
**36 Oil sources**  
**37 Elmer's bane**  
**38 Rat —**  
**39 "Avatar" race**  
**40 Model Heidi**  
**42 CBS forensic drama**  
**43 Small batteries**  
**44 Inherited**  
**45 Scot's denial**

**Solution time: 25 mins.**

W	N	B	A	N	A	H	A	S	H	E
L	A	H	L	H	D	A	S	P	L	D
A	V	E	C	O	A	H	T	A	H	S
R	T	T	O	R	T	D	A	R	N	
I	L	I	F	I	O	I	I	I	I	
R	U	N	S	R	E	P	O	N	I	N
A	L	T	P	A	R	P	U	G	E	T
I	D	O	L	N	A	M	W	I	N	E
M	A	M	A	S	C	I	N	E	E	D

**Yesterday's answer 12-29**

**CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY:** Jude Law, 51; Patricia Clarkson, 64; Ted Danson, 76; Jon Voight, 85.

**Happy Birthday:** Keep your goal in focus. Stick to the truth, do what you know and do best, and maintain consistency as you move forward. Look at the big picture and fine-tune each component of your plan as you proceed. Don't ignore how much things cost or let anger take over or lead you astray. If you choose progress over revenge, you'll find it easier to feel gratitude. Your numbers are 3, 14, 21, 25, 32, 37, 43.

**ARIES (March 21-April 19):** Travel, amusements and a carefree attitude may feel inviting, but if the price tag exceeds what you can afford, back away. Set boundaries and stick to a plan that doesn't cause stress. Make maintaining structure and balance in your life your top priorities. ★★★★★

**TAURUS (April 20-May 20):** A desire or offering will tempt you. Refuse to give anyone an inkling of how you feel or what you'll do next. Recognize a pressure tactic and remove yourself from any situation that makes you feel uncomfortable. Make self-improvement your first choice. ★★

**GEMINI (May 21-June 20):** Keep your eyes wide open. Situations are not as they appear, and tensions are mounting. Don't be too quick to reveal your position or to sign up for something uncertain. Gather information and refuse to pledge time or money you may regret. ★★★★★

**CANCER (June 21-July 22):** Keep your money and possessions safe. Hasty decisions will put you in a vulnerable position that will be difficult to clear up within the necessary time frame. Someone you think you can trust will let

you down. Revisit your options and choose the path adversaries least expect. ★★★

**LEO (July 23-Aug. 22):** Emotions will surface, and your patience will wane. Your best recourse is to challenge your mental and physical skills to ensure you are in tiptop shape and ready for whatever comes your way. Making personal improvements will confirm what's important to you. ★★★

**VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22):** Be prepared to alter your course to accommodate the changes you encounter. Observation will pay off and encourage you to oversee every detail regarding meaningful relationships, your position and your path forward. Proceed with caution and only trust what's verified and authentic. ★★★

**LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22):** Pay attention to the changes taking place financially, physically or contractually, and adjust to ensure you aren't penalized for late fees. Laziness or not gathering sufficient information will cost you. Take care of business before moving on to pleasurable pastimes. Romance is favored. ★★★★★

**SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21):** Act quickly before a window of opportunity closes. Rely on your intuition and connections to help bring about positive change and long-term results. Don't give in to someone trying to goad you into unrealistic expenditures. ★★

**SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21):** Ask questions before passing the information along. Look for alternative investments or ways to save money. Changing your attitude toward work, money and life goals will help you realize what's possible and how to get ahead. Choose a healthy lifestyle. ★★★★★

## EUGENIA LAST

THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

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UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

**CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19):** Creativity will spark your imagination, but before you follow through with your plans, consider how much it will cost. A physical tally of your resources and the people you can rely on to help you reach your goal will pay off. ★★★

**AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18):** Simplifying things will bring you peace of mind and a chance to consider your next move. Information, research and physically trying your hand at something you want to pursue will bring you insight into the possibilities. Love conquers all. ★★★

**PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20):** Curb your emotions and focus on what you can do to ensure you complete unfinished business. Being fully prepared to wipe the slate clean so that you can start a new chapter will ease your mind, allowing you to enjoy the upcoming festivities. ★★★

**Birthday Baby:** You are amenable, talkative and influential. You are organized and attentive.

★: Avoid conflicts; work behind the scenes. ★★: You can accomplish, but don't rely on others. ★★★: Focus and you'll reach your goals. ★★★★★: Aim high; start new projects. ★★★★★: Nothing can stop you; go for gold.

## SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku

By Dave Green

2			6					7
7	5				9			6
				8		2		
		2						8
3				2		9	7	4
5		4		9			6	
			4		5	8		
	6							
					6	4	9	

Difficulty: ★★★★★

12/29

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Saturday.

Yesterday's Answer

9	5	6	4	7	8	2	1	3
2	8	7	3	1	6	9	5	4
1	3	4	5	9	2	6	8	7
3	1	5	9	6	4	7	2	8
7	2	8	1	5	3	4	6	9
6	4	9	8	2	7	1	3	5
5	6	3	2	4	9	8	7	1
8	9	2	7	3	1	5	4	6
4	7	1	6	8	5	3	9	2

Difficulty: ★★

12/28

## WONDERWORD

By DAVID OUELLET

**HOW TO PLAY:** All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally and even backward. Find them, circle each letter of the word and strike it off the list. The leftover letters spell the WONDERWORD.

MELTING CHEESE

Solution: 6 letters

E E N I T U O P O T I R R U B  
N P T I U C S I B S P I H C D  
I I A O F S G T O A W T A E H  
P C C M T G L F T F O K G O P  
L E O E E T T E L C A R U O  
A R A L M R E N S A A E O M T  
L K A E B I E N J A G S S U A  
L T S T R Y A Y O R U E W E T  
E A S B C C E G U L I C E N O  
R N I P H R O B E R O D E S A  
A I W O E U E L F U G V T T Z  
Z T S T D A P A S T A F O E Z  
Z N N A D P R S M O K E Y R I  
O O O G A I S A E Y S T E W P  
M F I T R A V A H S D A E R B

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12/29

Aged, Alpine, Apple, Asiago, Biscuit, Breads, Brie, Burger, Burrito, Cheddar, Chips, Colby, Cow, Creamy, Fast, Feta, Fontina, Fries, Gouda, Gruyere, Havarti, Heat, Melt, Monterey Jack, Mozzarella, Muenster, Nachos, Omelet, Pasta, Pear, Pizza, Potato, Poutine, Provolone, Raclette, Recipe, Salt, Sauce, Smokey, Soft, Soup, Steak, Stew, Sweet, Swiss, Taco, Taleggio

Yesterday's Answer: Family Dog

The NEW TELEWORD VINTAGE COLLECTION EDITION #1 can be purchased on line at www.WonderWordBooks.com. In Canada, call 1-855-232-2367.

## STUMPED?

For answers to today's crossword, call 1-900-226-5955! 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.



# Maxey, Harris, Melton help 76ers beat Magic without Embiid



**ORLANDO, Fla.** (AP)—The 76ers didn't have their All-Star center Wednesday night, but they brought their defense.

Tyrese Maxey scored 23 points and Tobias Harris and De'Anthony Melton added 22 each for Philadelphia, which beat the Orlando Magic 112-92 while playing without reigning MVP Joel Embiid.

"We got deflections, got a lot of runouts. It was our first time trying some different things out there defensively," Maxey said. "It really worked, really helped us."

Paul Reed had 15 points, 10 rebounds and three blocks for the Sixers while starting at center for Embiid, the league's leading scorer who missed a second straight game with a sprained right ankle. Philadelphia has won nine of its past 11 games.

"I think we certainly got to find another style to play because it's so different when he's there, and the first couple (games) weren't great," Sixers coach Nick Nurse said. "Playing well enough to give ourselves a chance to win is the



Philadelphia 76ers forward Tobias Harris (12) celebrates his 3-pointer as Orlando Magic forward Paolo Banchero (5) reacts during the second half of an NBA basketball game, Wednesday, Dec. 27, 2023, in Orlando, Fla.

main thing without Joel."

Franz Wagner scored 24 points for the Magic, who were held to a season low in scoring and have lost five of seven. Jalen Suggs added 20 points and Paolo Banchero added 19 points and nine rebounds for Orlando, which shot 9 for 33

from 3-point range.

Banchero struggled all night and finished 6 of 21 from the field.

"I thought they did a really good job of plugging the paint and our ability to navigate that," Magic coach Jamahl Mosley said. "You have to

give them credit for recognizing the game plan and executing it at a high level."

The Magic, who have hit less than 28% of their 3s in each of their last three losses, got some open looks from behind the arc, and Suggs said they had to take them.

"They're great looks. We wouldn't trade any of those," he said. "Those are shots we're living with and we'll take those every time. If you don't take them, that looks crazy."

Harris scored twice during a 9-0 run that gave the Sixers the first of three 11-point leads they held in the third period. Suggs responded with a dunk and a 3-pointer before being called for his fourth foul with 7:04 left in the quarter.

Back-to-back 3-pointers by Banchero and Caleb Houston got the Magic back within three with 9:36 remaining, but Harris and Melton hit 3s for the 76ers and Orlando never threatened again. The Magic scored only 17 points in the fourth quarter.

Maxey, coming back from a 4-for-20 shooting performance in a Christmas Day loss at Miami, scored 14 points in the first half despite sitting out the final eight minutes of the first quarter with two fouls.

"I stayed aggressive, let the game come to me a little more tonight," he said. "The shots fell, the same shots I've been making all year."

## SUNS 129, ROCKETS 113

**HOUSTON** (AP)—Kevin Durant had 27 points, 10 rebounds and a career-high 16 assists for his 18th career triple-double, helping Phoenix beat Houston to end a three-game losing streak.

Durant was 9 of 16 from the field and also had two steals and a block in Phoenix's first road victory since Nov. 26. The Suns improved to 15-15.

Eric Gordon matched Durant with 27 points in his first game back in Houston since being traded in February. He scored 17 points in the Suns' 43-point second quarter en

route to a 73-55 halftime lead. Devin Booker added 20 points.

Alperen Sengun led Houston with 24 points.

## THUNDER 129, KNICKS 120

**OKLAHOMA CITY** (AP)—Shai Gilgeous-Alexander and Jalen Williams each scored 36 points, and Williams hit a pair of 3-pointers in the fourth quarter in Oklahoma City's victory over New York.

Chet Holmgren added 22 points for Oklahoma City, which beat Western Conference-leading Minnesota on Tuesday night and was playing its third back-to-back this season. The Thunder are 20-9.

Julius Randle led New York with 25 points.

## CAVALIERS 113, MAVERICKS 110

**DALLAS** (AP)—Caris LeVert scored 29 points, hitting the go-ahead 3-pointer late in the fourth quarter, and Cleveland rallied from 20 points down in the first half to beat Dallas.

The Mavericks went five minutes without scoring in the fourth quarter as a nine-point lead turned into a 111-105 deficit with 1:13 remaining.

Jarrett Allen had 24 points and 23 rebounds, one off his career high, to help the Cavs improve to 3-1 in the four games Donovan Mitchell has missed with an illness.

Luka Dončić scored 39 points for Dallas to get to at least 30 for the 14th time in 15 games.

## BUCKS 144, NETS 122

**NEW YORK** (AP)—Giannis Antetokounmpo had 32 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists, Khristian Middleton added 27 points and 10 assists and Milwaukee beat a Brooklyn team that treated it like a preseason game.

The Nets rested three starters and barely played two others on the night after a victory in Detroit that extended the Pistons' losing streak to 27, an NBA single-season record.

Rookie Jalen Wilson had 21 points and 10 rebounds for the Nets.

## RAPTORS 132, WIZARDS 102

**WASHINGTON** (AP)—OG Anonuby scored 26 points, Pascal Siakam had 22 points and 11 assists and Toronto eased past Washington.

Scottie Barnes had 20 points and 12 rebounds. The Raptors snapped a three-game slide and five-game road losing streak while beginning a stretch of nine of 10 on the road.

Washington has lost three straight to fall to 5-25—the franchise's second-worst 30-game start.

## Cuban says changing NBA landscape led to sale of Mavs to casino families

**DALLAS** (AP)—Mark Cuban sees a future of NBA ownership where the advantages will be in real estate.

The high-profile billionaire says that's why he sold his majority stake in the Dallas Mavericks to a pair of families with strong ties to the hotel and casino industry.

The NBA on Wednesday approved Cuban's sale of a controlling interest in the Mavericks to the Adelson and Dumont families, who run Las Vegas Sands Corp.

The deal was approved just shy of a month since Miriam Adelson and Sivan and Patrick Dumont announced their intention to buy the club. The purchase is in the valuation range of \$3.5 billion.

Patrick Dumont, Adelson's son-in-law and president and chief operating officer of Las Vegas Sands, will serve as Mavericks governor. Adelson is the widow of casino magnate Sheldon Adelson.

Cuban will be the alternate governor with a 27% stake in the club and will maintain control of basketball operations. He made it clear there were no plans for the franchise to leave Dallas.

"The advantage is what can you build and where and you need to have somebody who's really, really good at that," Cuban said before the Mavs' game against Cleveland on Wednesday night. "Patrick and

Miriam, they're the best in the world at what they do. Literally, around the world.

"When you get a world-class partner who can come in and grow your revenue base and you're not dependent on things that you were in the past, that's a huge win," Cuban said.

Miriam Adelson is the controlling shareholder of Las Vegas Sands Corp., a publicly traded Las Vegas company that built the Venetian and Palazzo resorts but now only has casino operations in Macau and Singapore. Sheldon Adelson, the founder of Las Vegas Sands, died in 2021 at age 87.

"Through our commitment and additional investment in the team, we look forward to partnering with Mark Cuban to build on the team's success and legacy in Dallas and beyond," the Adelson and Dumont families said in a statement. "The goal is to win and to have a team that proudly represents the greater DFW area and serves as a strong and valuable member of the local community."

Cuban said when he bought the Mavericks in 2000, he had the advantage of understanding technology. He became a billionaire when the radio internet streaming company he co-founded was bought by Yahoo.

Now, the future of media rights deals is in question. Diamond Sports, the company that owns the regional sports net-

work that carries the Mavericks, is in bankruptcy proceedings.

Cuban said the sale makes revenue from media rights deals much less of a concern for the Mavericks.

"Financially, we're in a far better position this afternoon than we were yesterday afternoon to be able to compete like that," Cuban said.

The 65-year-old insisted he would have final say in the hiring and firing of coaches, and the signing of free agents, "unless we're going to go hire somebody that cost \$300 million a year."

And Cuban said spending to keep the team competitive won't be an issue with Patrick Dumont.

"He basically said, 'Just do what you've got to do. I want to win,'" Cuban said.

Gambling isn't legal in Texas, and efforts to legalize it face steep odds. Still, Miriam Adelson has made no secret of her push to bring casino gambling to the Lone Star State.

She pumped more than \$2 million last year into a political action committee, called Texas Sands, which donated lavishly to state legislators and swarmed the GOP-controlled Capitol with lobbyists. She gave an additional \$1 million separately to Republican Gov. Greg Abbott.

But the spending blitz failed to deliver a breakthrough this



# Peppers, Gates headline 15 player finalists for Pro Football Hall of Fame

By JOSH DUBOW  
AP PRO FOOTBALL WRITER



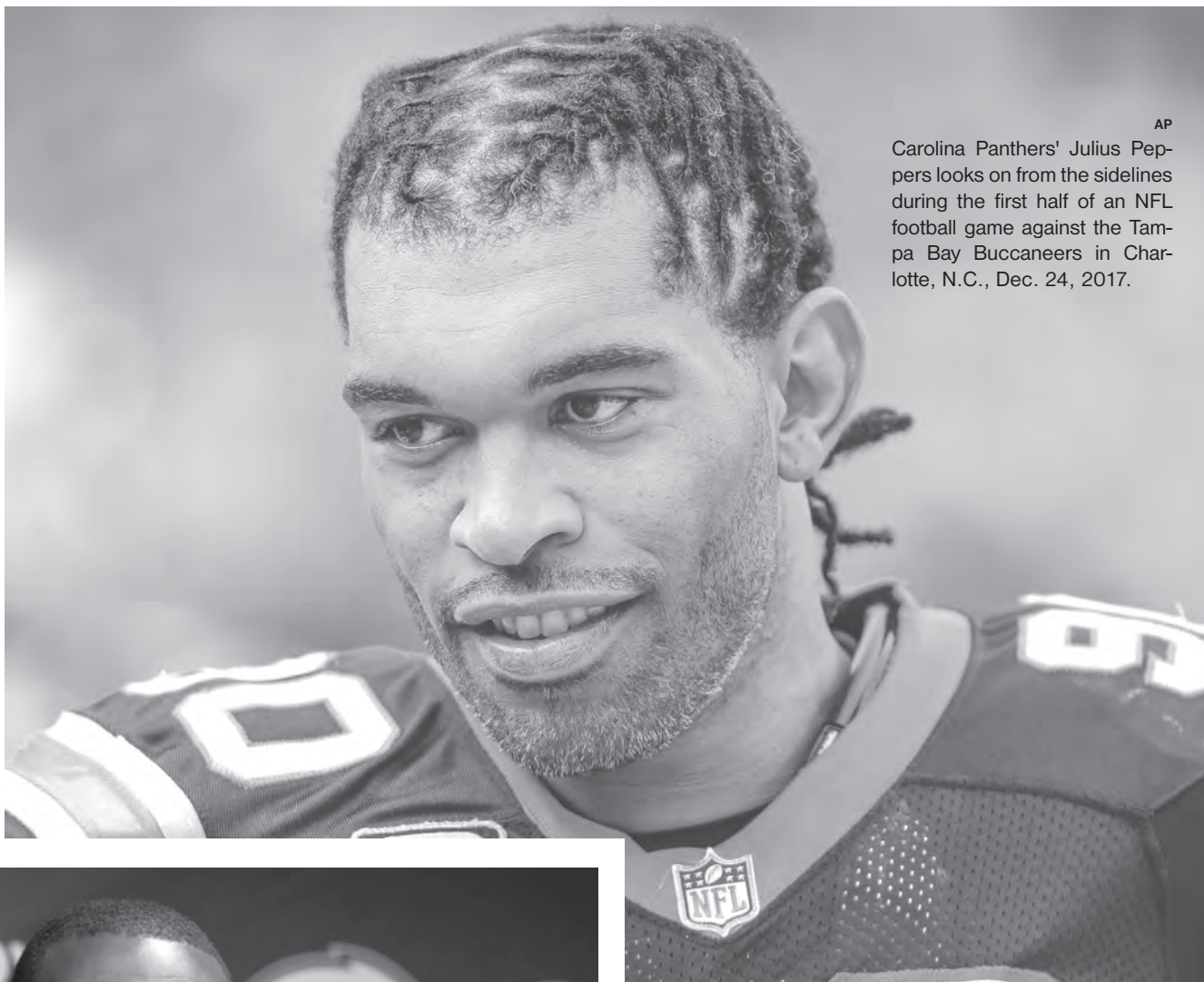
First-time candidates Julius Peppers and Antonio Gates

joined nine returning finalists who advanced to the final stage of voting for the Pro Football Hall of Fame's class of 2024.

Peppers and Gates were announced Wednesday as finalists in their first year of eligibility. They will be joined on the 15-player ballot by five-time finalist receivers Torrey Holt and Reggie Wayne.

Seven other players returned as finalists with Patrick Willis, Andre Johnson, Dwight Freeney, Jared Allen, Willie Anderson, Darren Woodson and Devin Hester all getting back to this step.

Defensive backs Eric Allen and Rodney Harrison, running back Fred Taylor and of-



AP  
Carolina Panthers' Julius Peppers looks on from the sidelines during the first half of an NFL football game against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in Charlotte, N.C., Dec. 24, 2017.

He had 12 sacks as a rookie and never really slowed down in a 17-year career that included stops in Chicago and Green Bay before ending with the Panthers. He was an All-Pro in 2004, 2006 and 2010.

Peppers finished his career with 159 1/2 sacks—the fourth most since they became official in 1982—and had 10 seasons with double-digit sacks. Only Hall of Famers Bruce Smith (13) and Reggie White (12) had more.

Gates played only basketball in college before turning into one of the NFL's top tight ends. He switched to football after going undrafted in basketball.

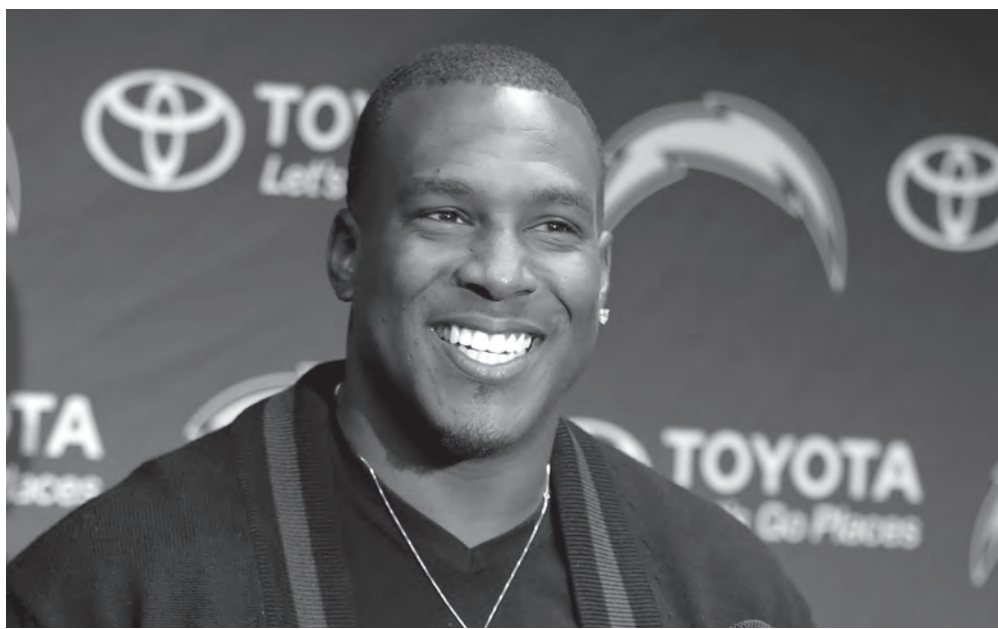
The Chargers took a chance on him and it paid off in a big way, as he became an All-Pro in just his second season in 2004. He was an All-Pro again the next two seasons and went on to have a 16-year career for the team.

Gates finished with 955 catches for 11,841 yards and an NFL record for tight ends with 116 touchdown receptions. Only Hall of Famer Tony Gonzalez and Jason Witten have more catches or yards as a tight end.

The class also includes three prolific wide receivers with Johnson, Holt and Wayne all catching more than 900 passes and ranking in the top 20 in career yards receiving.

Allen and Freeney both rank in the top 20 all-time in sacks, and had four and three first-team All-Pro selections, respectively.

Willis (five), Evans (four), Anderson (three), Woodson (three), Hester (three) and Harrison (two) all had multiple first-team All-Pro selections.



AP

San Diego Chargers tight end Antonio Gates speaks after an NFL football game against the Kansas City Chiefs Sunday, Jan. 1, 2017, in San Diego.

fensive lineman Jahri Evans made it to this stage for the first time after previously being semifinalists.

The 15 finalists will be trimmed to 10 and then five during the selection meeting early next year. The final five candidates will need to get 80% of the votes from the panel to get into the Hall.

Four finalists previously announced are Buddy Parker in the coaching category, and Randy Gradishar, Steve McMichael and Art Powell in the senior category. They also will get in if they get support

from at least 80% of voters.

The class of 2024 will be announced at the NFL Honors show on Feb. 8 in Las Vegas, when The Associated Press' season awards for 2023 will also be announced.

Peppers and Gates were both college basketball players before finding their greatest success in football.

Peppers was one of the league's most dominant linemen after being picked second overall by Carolina in 2002 following a two-sport career in college at North Carolina.

## Brissett to start for Commanders vs. 49ers after Howell was pulled from last 2 games



A S H -  
B U R N ,  
Va. (AP)—

Jacoby Brissett is set to start at quarterback for the Washington Commanders on Sunday when they host the NFC-leading San Francisco 49ers, a decision coach Ron Rivera framed as a chance for Sam Howell to get a breather late in a long season with the team long out of playoff contention.

Brissett takes over after Howell was pulled from each of the past two games, most recently a 30-28 loss at the New York Jets in which he was 6 of 22 with two interceptions. The 31-year-old journeyman is on track to be the 13th different QB to start for Washington since 2018,

and at least one more could be coming next season when new ownership puts another regime in charge.

For now, it's the abandonment of Rivera's nearly yearlong plan to see if Howell could be the future of the franchise at football's most important position, which included bringing in Eric Bieniemy to be offensive coordinator and spanned the sale of the team.

"I think this is probably a good opportunity for Sam to take a break," Rivera said Wednesday before practice. "This is about Sam's continued development, and things hadn't gone as well as we would have liked for him the last few weeks, so we just think this is a good opportunity

for him to watch."

Howell started the first 15 games of the season, and he leads the league with 17 interceptions. The 2022 fifth-round pick out of North Carolina has been sacked a league-high 60 times and has thrown 557 passes, second only to Patrick Mahomes.

The Commanders have lost six in a row to fall to 4-11. The 49ers opened as 13 1/2-point favorites on FanDuel Sportsbook coming off their home loss to Baltimore, before the shift to Brissett made them 12 1/2-point favorites.

"He's going to give us a chance to really be successful," receiver Terry McLaurin said. "He's pretty much seen it all at this point in his career, so we're excited to get out

there and play with him."

Rivera said he let owners know about his decision, adding: "The big thing everybody has to understand is that they have been very supportive of everything that we have done so far."

Howell said he was disappointed to learn he lost the starting job.

"It is what it is," Howell said. "Just going to try to do whatever I can to continue to get better these last two weeks and try to learn as much as I can, watch Jacoby play, support him and try to be a good teammate."

After four seasons running Washington's football operations, Rivera and much of the front office and coaching staff are expected to be fired next month as Josh Harris' group puts its stamp on the team it paid \$6.05 billion to buy from former owner Dan Snyder.

Brissett, a 31-year-old jour-

neyman who signed a \$10 million contract for this season to back up and mentor Howell, was 18 of 23 for 224 yards and three touchdowns in relief over the past two games.

"Jacoby's proven that he's a very, very viable player in this league," Rivera said. "It's amazing to watch the professionalism with which Jacoby does things."

This is set to be Brissett's 49th NFL start and first since Nov. 27, 2022, with Cleveland.

Brissett is on the verge of joining Howell, Taylor Heinicke, Carson Wentz, Alex Smith, Dwayne Haskins, Ryan Fitzpatrick, Kyle Allen, Garrett Gilbert, Case Keenum, Colt McCoy, Josh Johnson and Mark Sanchez as QBs to start for Washington since the start of the 2018 season—the year after Kirk Cousins left for Minnesota. He's the ninth since Rivera took over.

"It's going to be a challenge,

for sure, but I'm up for the challenge," Brissett said. "I wouldn't be in this situation if I didn't think I could handle it."

Howell, still on an affordable rookie contract, could also return, though defensive tackle Jonathan Allen acknowledged his younger teammate "has a battle ahead of him."

While Rivera's not expected to be the one deciding who plays Week 1 in 2024, the veteran coach who guided Carolina to the Super Bowl nearly a decade ago believes Howell could still be an NFL starter.

"There's been some good moments where he's learned a lot, and I think there's some moments where he's had to take a couple lumps," Rivera said. "But he's a resilient player, a solid young man who I think has a bright future in this league. I really do. I think he's a guy who can play quarterback in the NFL and do it well and do it at a high level."



# Return to the diamond, basketball courts, and the ring

By LEIGH GASES

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REPORTER

**6** This year saw the full swing return of different sports leagues after a long break due to the COVID-19 pandemic—the Saipan Baseball League, a full calendar of leagues by the Northern Marianas Islands Basketball Federation, and combat sports.

The return of sluggers to the diamond, ballers to the court, and fighters to the ring this year was met with excitement by athletes and the community alike—and a whole calendar of sports ensured more physical activity, the utilization of facilities, and more things for family and friends to do.

TanHoldings sponsored the return of the Saipan Baseball League and saw its first full season since 2018, with the undefeated Cardi-

nals taking the championship last August.

Last April also saw Kiana “Baby K” Camacho make history when she became the first woman in SBL history to play in the league when she suited up for the Blue Jays against the Braves.

The NMIBF, led by president James Lee, is currently hosting 3x3 tournaments as a chance for CNMI athletes to represent in the 3x3 FIBA Cup in Singapore next year. Throughout the year and since the opening of a newly renovated Gilbert C. Ada Gymnasium, they have hosted other leagues such as the “Mich” Ultra Cup Men’s Islandwide Basketball League and the return of the Inter Gov’t/Business League.

Trench Warz Promotions also recently kicked off the return of combat sports in the CNMI with the “Ring of Fire” boxing and kickboxing event that pitted CNMI and Guam athletes.



LEIGH GASES

TanHoldings and Northern Marianas Sports Association president Jerry Tan, left, and former sports broadcaster Bob Coldeen throws the first pitch during the opening ceremony of the Tan Holdings-Saipan Baseball League 2023 season last March at the Francisco “Tan Ko” Palacios Baseball Field.

## Full-time return of interscholastic sports

By LEIGH GASES

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**7** The school year 2022-2023 and the ongoing 2023-2024 season saw the first full time

return of interscholastic sports.

Interscholastic sports that made their uninterrupted comebacks include the whole lot—volleyball, basketball, badminton, cross country, soccer, va’a, athletics—and also welcomed a new edition—softball.

Many of the titles were won

by defending champs, but it also saw unexpected upsets.

The legacy of the Grace Christian Academy Lady Eagles is going strong as they won their unprecedented seventh title in girls high school volleyball.

In high school girls basketball, MHS won its fourth title at the end of the 2022-2023 school year, but were upset by Saipan Southern High School in the ongoing 2023-2024 season.

Much of the credit of a smooth and ever-growing sports pro-



LEIGH GASES

Marianas High School’s Airianna Estrada, right, spikes over two Agape Christian School defenders during their varsity game win in the return of the NMIVA-PSS Interscholastic Girls High School Volleyball League 2023-2024 Tuesday at the MHS Gymnasium.

gram goes to Public School System Athletic Program director

Nick Gross, his staff, the volunteers, and the sports federations.

## Paddlers dominate in Micro Cup with 16 medals

By LEIGH GASES

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**8** CNMI paddlers from the Marianas Outrigger Club, Saipan Paddling Club, and the Marianas Pacific Paddlers rowed their boats to 16 medals in the 23rd Annual Micronesia Cup Canoe Race in Guam last October.

MOC hauled the most hardware with four gold medals, three silver medals, and one bronze medal.

They won gold in the women’s 500m sprints, in the women’s 1,000m race, the men’s long distance 10-mile marathon race, and the mixed 1,000m race.

Pipit Ball won a silver medal in the V1 500m sprints; another silver was for the women’s long distance 10-mile marathon race, and in the mixed 500m

sprints. Their lone bronze medal was in the mixed long distance 8-mile race.

SPC, for their part, bagged three gold, one silver, and two bronze medals, while their junior boys paddlers—17-year-olds Tyler Andrew and Phillip Aldan—received the Top Junior Paddler awards.

Andrew and Aldan gave SPC two gold medals after topping both the junior boys 500m sprints and the 1,000m; the third gold was for the open men V6 1,000m team; their lone silver medal was in the open women V6 1,000m; and their bronze medals was for the open women V6 500m team, and the open men’s long distance 10-mile team.

To cap the event off against Guam and Palau, the MPP all women’s va’a team bagged two bronze medals in the open women 1,000m and the long distance 10-mile race.

## CNMI riders defend Turkey Cross title

By LEIGH GASES

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**9** CNMI riders defended their 2022 championship by beating Guam racers again in the 2023 Turkey Cross last November at the Cowtown Race Park.

The home team won eight out of 15 divisions.

Local riders won the Pee-wee ATV Class (Nakoa Torres), Mini ATV Class (Anelia Igotol), Power Puff Class (Billie Inabo Pangelinan), Big Boys ATV Class (Christian “Hollywood” Camacho),

Veterans ATV Class (Greg Clark), Veterans Class (Justis “Cuki” Alvarez), Intermediate Class (Aric Cruz), and Open Expert Class (Shane “Pikaboo” Alvarez).

Guam’s seven first place finishes were in the Pee-wee I Class (Kyan Mayo), Pee-wee II Class (Royce Butler), Mini I Class (Julian Lane), Mini II Class (Jonathan Aguon), Women’s Class (Marianna Wenden), Novice Class (Kanen Arceo), and Legends Class (Franklin Rios).

CNMI riders will once again defend the title in next year’s Turkey Cross.



TISHA FERRER

The CNMI’s Shane Alvarez, center, raises his Expert Class championship trophy during the awards ceremony for the 2023 Turkey Cross at the Cowtown Race Park. To his right is runner-up Blaze Aiken of Guam and to his left is another Guamanian, Johnny Aguon, who came in third. Alvarez led the Marianas Racing Association’s win against Guam in the event.

## CNMI hosts first Olympic qualifiers in badminton

By LEIGH GASES

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**10** The CNMI hosted for the first time two badminton Olympic qualifiers—the Crowne Plaza Northern Marianas Open 2023 and the TakeCare Saipan International 2023—at the newly renovated Gilbert C. Ada Gymnasium last June.

The two-week qualifiers welcomed more than 200 players, coaches, and officials from 19 different countries, and according to Badminton



LEIGH GASES

Top seed Guatemalan Kevin Cordon goes for a return during the TakeCare Saipan International 2023 at the Gilbert C. Ada Gymnasium last June.

Oceania president Loke Poh Wong, the Northern Marianas Badminton Association has

put the CNMI on the world map for badminton.

Badminton Oceania gave

the host NMBA a certificate of appreciation for the success of hosting the two qualifiers at the conclusion of the tourney.

The Crowne Plaza Northern Marianas Open 2023 was the first tournament that was held from June 6 to 11. Chinese-Taipei swept three events, while South Korea took home two championships.

The TakeCare Saipan International 2023 was from June 13 to June 18, with Chinese-Taipei and Japan taking home two championships, while USA won one.

NMI badminton athletes also competed in the qualifiers which included internationally ranked players from around the world.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Saipan Paddling Club poses for a photo during the 23rd Annual Micronesia Cup Canoe Race in Guam last October. Marianas Outrigger Club, Marianas Pacific Paddlers, and SPC collected 16 medals in the two-day event.



By LEIGH GASES  
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# CNMI tennis promoted to ITF Class B

**2** The Northern Mariana Islands Tennis Association reached a historic breakthrough in its tennis aspirations at the International Tennis Federation Annual General Meeting held in Cancun, Mexico last September.

NMITA's status was elevated from a Class C membership—to a Class B membership—after Dr. Bobby Cruz represented NMITA in the meeting.

Among the 20 countries in Pacific Oceania, only Guam

previously held Class B status.

With the support of NMI national tennis team head coach Jeff Race and the Oceania Tennis Federation leaders, the NMI now stands proudly as just the second Class B member in the Pacific region. This upgraded status paves the way for abundant opportunities for NMI tennis.

The ITF stands as the premier governing body, overseeing world tennis, with a global representation of over 200 member nations.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Dr. Bobby Cruz, second left, poses for a photo with Oceania Federation members after he represented the Northern Mariana Islands Tennis Association at the International Tennis Federation Annual General Meeting held in Cancun, Mexico last September.

## Nat'l soccer teams perform well on all stages

By LEIGH GASES  
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REPORTER

**3** The NMI Men's and Women's National Soccer teams put on quite a show on the international stage and back home.

The 2023 Pacific Games in Honiara, Solomon Islands marked the NMI's Oceania debut. The men's national team paid their dues and won their first game in Oceania over American Samoa and also held their own against FI-FA-ranked teams such as Fiji and Tahiti.

As the men were competing in the South Pacific, the women's national team were underway in their competition in Zhuhai, China for the Women's EAFF E-1 Football Championships Preliminary Competition.

They upset Mongolia and came away with a win against Mongolia and capped the tourney with a win against Macau

for an even 2-2.

This was also the first year back for the women's national team to compete in the Asian Football Confederation since the pandemic in 2020. The U20 Women's National Soccer Team competed in Palestine in the AFC U20 Asian Cup Qualifiers last March.

Also, the NMI U15 Men's National Soccer Team competed in the FIFA Forward Developmental Programme EAFF U15 Men's Championship 2023 in Qingdao, China; and the NMI U17 Women's National Team competed in the AFC U17 Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers.

Regionally last August, the NMI U23 men's and women's national teams completed a sweep of Guam's U23 men's and women's teams in the first Marianas Football Club matchup since 2019. This month, NMIFA's Eleven Tiger won the first Inaugural Marianas Club Championship against Guam's Wings FC.



EAFF

NMI Women's National Soccer Team player Pia Ngewakl, left, goes after the ball during their game against Mongolia during their upset match in the Women's EAFF E-1 Football Championships Preliminary Competition in Zhuhai, China last Nov. 30.



LEIGH GASES

NMI Men's National Soccer Team player Markus Toves, right, tangles up for possession with a Tuvalu player during their last match in the 2023 Pacific Games last Nov. in Honiara, Solomon Islands.

## CNMI netters continue to climb ranks

By LEIGH GASES  
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**4** CNMI netters—Colin Sinclair and Carol Lee—keep climbing the ranks in the international and national tennis scene.

This year, Sinclair has achieved his highest career ranking in the ATP at No. 347, from No. 410 in 2019.

He will move up to play in his first ever full tour event, the Zhuhai ASTP 250 next year.



Lee



Sinclair

The 29-year-old won his third and most recent singles title in the ITF Tour after taking home the champion-

ship of the Rancho Santa Fe Tournament in California over Frenchman Jaimee Floyd Angelle, 6-3, 6-2.

Meanwhile, collegiate athlete Lee, who plays tennis for Georgia Tech, got her second All-American selection this year after the Intercollegiate Tennis Association officially announced the 2023 All-American honorees.

She also made her second appearance in the NCAA Singles Championships and reached the quarterfinals, marking the deepest run of her career. A mainstay in the national singles rankings, Lee climbed as high as No. 7 nationally on March 21 and finished that season ranked No. 14.

## Swimmers take int'l pools by storm

By LEIGH GASES  
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REPORTER

**5** No pool, no problem for NMI swimmers as they took the international competition by storm as they broke personal and national records left and right.

Aside from the four medals won by the CNMI National Swim Team in the 2023 Pacific Games in Honiara, Solomon Islands, there were seven age group records broken and 11 national records reset.

The updated records were: the men's 4x100 freestyle relay team's time of 3:39.66 broke the national record; Maria Batalones' 50m breaststroke time of 35.09 seconds broke the 15-16 age group and national record; the men's 4x200m freestyle relay time of 8:16.38 broke the national record; Kean Pajarillaga's 200m backstroke time

of 2:16.40 broke the 17-18 age group and national record; Juhn Tenorio's 200m backstroke time of 2:14.79 then updated the national record again; Isaiah Aleksenko's 200m butterfly of 2:05.86 reset the 17-8 age group and national record, his 50m butterfly time of 25.31 seconds updated the 17-18 age group and national record, and he went on to update both

again in the finals with a time of 25.13 seconds; Aleksenko, in the 50m freestyle of the 4x50m mixed freestyle relay clocked in at 24.66 seconds to reset the 17-18 age group and national record; Batalones broke the 15-16 age group record in the 100m breaststroke with a time of 1:20.86; and finally, the men's 4x100 medley relay team updated the national record with

their time of 3:59.97.

Before the Pacific Games, Aleksenko and Batalones combined for 10 new CNMI and age group records and 12 if you include the 4x100 freestyle relay and 4x100 mixed relay last July in the 20th FINA World Championships in Fukuoka, Japan.

Then in September, Taiyo Akimaru, Kean Pajarillaga, and Jinie Thompson broke their personal bests in the 9th FINA Junior World Championships in Netanya, Israel.



LEIGH GASES

The NMI National Swim Team poses for a group photo with their coaches Hiroki Kimura, far right, and Richard Sikkell, back, left in hat, at the Aquatic Center in Honiara, Solomon Islands last November.





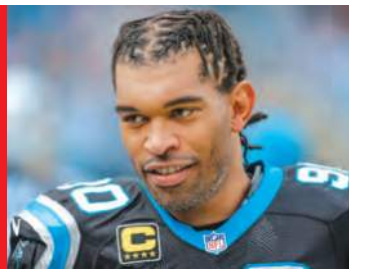
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# Saipan Tribune Sports

Peppers, Gates  
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player finalists  
for Pro Football  
Hall of Fame.

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## 13 medals in 2023 Pacific Games



LEIGH GASES

Team NMI, in a sea of blue, poses for a group photo as they show off the flag during the opening ceremony of the 2023 Pacific Games in Honiara, Solomon Islands last Nov. 19.

By LEIGH GASES  
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REPORTER

It was a show of the relentlessness of the human spirit and the capabilities of the human body as Team NMI's 100-plus athletes were forged like steel in the tough and competitive environment in Honiara, Solomon Islands, for almost three weeks during the 2023 Pacific Games from Nov. 15 to Dec. 3.

Despite all the trials and tribulations they went through, Team NMI still was able to flourish at the highest level—and the icing on top of hauling in 13 medals—five of which were gold, one was silver, and seven were bronze—the team's performance in the South Pacific is named *Saipan Tribune's* 2023 Sports Story of the Year. Not only did hardware gleam and glisten on the athletes' necks, with their photos and names etched forever in the history



books, a Pacific Games record was broken in the sport of athletics, along with multiple NMI national records reset during the competition.

The number 13 isn't such bad luck after all as the medal haul of 13 was good enough to be ranked 13 out of 24 Pacific island nations.

The five gold medals came by way of weightlifting's Ray Santos who gave the team its first gold of the Games in the snatch portion of the 55kg weight class; bodybuilding's Christina Tudela handed the team its first gold medal won by a woman athlete; Tania Tan won two gold medals—one in the 5,000m and one in the 10,000m race—and broke a Pacific Games record in the 5,000m race with a time of 18:08.69; and 17-year-old high school swimmer Isaiah Aleksenko outswam seasoned ath-



LEIGH GASES

Team NMI is led by flagbearer, 4x medalist, and swimmer Isaiah Aleksenko during the opening ceremony of the 2023 Pacific Games in Honiara, Solomon Islands last Nov. 19.

letes in the 200m butterfly.

The lone silver medal went to Santos in the overall category of his weight class and also won bronze in the clean & jerk portion.

The six other bronze medals went to Aleksenko in the 100m butterfly; weightlifting's Leowell Cristobal in the clean & jerk portion of the 67-kg class; the men's 4x200m freestyle relay team made up of Juhn Tenorio, Taiyo Akimaru, Aleksenko, and Kean Pajarillaga, and the 4x100m medley relay team that consisted of Tenorio, Kouki Watanabe, Aleksenko, and Pajarillaga; bodybuilding's Davy Laxa in the under 65-kg weight class; and the volleyball duo of Logan Mister and Andrew Johnson handed the team its final medal after defeating host

team Solomon Islands.

There were also multiple fourth and fifth place finishes by NMI athletes in the 10 sports they competed in.

To scale, the CNMI is considered to be one of the smallest participating countries, population-wise, and competed in just 10 sports—while powerhouse countries like New Caledonia, Tahiti, and host Solomon Islands competed in almost all if not all 24 sports.

After the CNMI's more than successful hosting of the 2022 Pacific Mini Games—which was considered to be the best by the Pacific Games Council—it goes to show not only can the tiny Commonwealth that could compete and host on a small scale, but also

hang in there with the big boys on a much bigger stage as the Pacific Games.

The 2023 Pacific Games drew more than 5,000 athletes and officials from all over Oceania in the biggest sporting event in the region—which is considered to be the Pacific's "Olympics" as it's held every four years.

With that, this was the best showing of Team NMI in a Pacific Games ever. So, congratulations to the CNMI, its athletes, and its sponsors Joeten Daidai Foundation, Triple J, Crowne Plaza Resort, IT&E, IP&E, Tan Siu Lin Foundation, Mobil, Tan Holdings, and McDonald's of Guam & Saipan, for a top-tier performance in the biggest sporting competition in the Pacific.



LEIGH GASES

2023 Pacific Games gold medalists, from left, Tania Tan, Christina Tudela, Isaiah Aleksenko, and Ray Santos pose with their medals and incentives during the 2023 Pacific Games Team NMI appreciation dinner at the Crowne Plaza Resort Saipan last Dec. 19.